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INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

ALSO BY PHYLLIS BOTTOME

PERFECT WIFE
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ALFRED ADLER
MASKS AND FACES
HEART OF A CHILD
LONDON PRIDE
FORMIDABLE TO TYRANTS
WITHIN THE CUP
THE LIFE LINE



INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

Stories by
PHYLLIS BOTTOME

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TO
GERTRUDE ATHERTON

IN RECOGNITION OF THE DEBT
ALL WOMEN AND ALL WRITERS OWE TO HER
FROM HER GREATEST DEBTOR

CONTENTS

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

LOST	<i>page</i> 11
THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE	21
THE WHITE TULIP	31
THE VOCATION	37
THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK	47
BROTHER LEO	63
THE WILD BIRD	79
THE HOME-COMING	87
DOUBLE LIFE	99
THE GATE	115
FOUND	125

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

THE TUG-OF-WAR	139
THE LIQUEUR GLASS	155
THE SHUT DOOR	163
A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE	175
THE VISITATION	189
A GAME OF SKILL	201
THE BATTLE-FIELD	213
THE RESIDUE	233
A LAST GIFT	245

**STORIES
OF
INNOCENCE**

LOST

Alois's room was made out of pine wood, and looked straight into blue air. You could see many other mountains from the mountain meadow on which he lived. The Hohe Mund towered up behind the chalet like a crouching stone beast; the Hoch Eder facing it, eleven thousand feet high, drew tightly, up to its very crest, a cloak of green. Its lower slopes were intricately embroidered with pines and larches and broken by gorges of purple air or by the sudden white lace of waterfalls. The Kalk Mountains stood at one end of the valley, a great range of bare and jagged peaks biting their way into the sky and taking all the colour the sun cared to give them.

But Alois seldom wished to look at mountains. What he liked best was to peer down from his window, over the edge of the meadow, to the valley floor, three thousand feet below him. Little shining villages were scattered about on it with tall church towers; a silver river wound through it to unknown lands. Napoleon's smooth white road stretched straight as a ruler between an avenue of poplars, which marched on either side of it like soldiers off to the wars.

There was even a whole town, set in little squares and made out of red brick. Alois would have liked to pick up the houses and move them about, and he longed to march, like the tall poplars, along Napoleon's road.

At night the town and all the little villages twinkled, till Alois had two heavens full of stars, one above his head and one beneath his feet.

Alois dreamed that when he was a man he would go down into the valley and follow the silver river to the ends of the earth. He would visit the sparkling cities, and perhaps build one for himself on the smooth green floor.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

When Alois's father went down into the valley, he took only cows or calves with him. If he sold them well, he came up drunk, and if he sold them badly, he came up sober. If he was drunk, he beat his wife and children, but if he was sober, he beat them all the same.

It was strange that Alois had so many dreams, for neither his father nor his mother were dreamers.

They were unusually well-off peasants, who kept a flourishing inn and had thirteen cows. They had a child, too, every year—so many that Herr Heiss often grumbled that he couldn't get his own nose into his own plate; but he admitted that the boys might be useful later on.

Alois was the eldest of ten, and a good deal was expected of him even now. He had to wake, wash, and dress all but the last two babies, and give them their breakfast before school. He had to help milk the cows, look after the sheep, feed pigs, do his school work, chop wood, run errands for his mother, and help put the children to bed at night.

You could not call him a lazy child; and he was so willing and had such a smiling face that all the neighbours loved him—and very often gave him their errands to run as well.

His father and mother loved him, too, but not particularly, because they had no time to love anyone particularly; and his father thrashed Alois quite as often as he thrashed the others.

But his mother noticed that Alois was not quite like the other children, because he never tortured nor hurt wild things, nor did he fly into tempers and roar, nor steal food behind her back.

Sometimes his unusual conduct disturbed her a little; she thought it better for a child to be like everybody else. She herself had always been as nearly like everybody else as possible, only a little worse-tempered and rougher-tongued, because she had the inn to manage as well as the children and her own house. Having a baby every year, and going to bed for three whole days for it, was the only quiet time Frau Heiss ever had. She would say sometimes, a little uneasily, to a neighbour: 'I don't know what to make of my boy Alois. You might say he was like the Christ Child: never a rough word on his lips, and always ready

to help Babe or Bantling! If he wasn't so stout and well, I should think it was the consumption. But drink or rheumatism is all either of our families have ever had wrong with them, thank God! and perhaps he'll outgrow his soft ways in time.' Then she would dash out of the yard, to whack a cow or shout at a child, and let her uneasiness drop.

Still she couldn't altogether get rid of it, because a Christ Child would hardly possess thirteen cows, an inn, and more than his share of meadowland in Flauerling, which was what she hoped for Alois.

The village priest said to himself, 'Surely this is a child of God, sent to comfort me in my old age.' And he told Alois more about God and the saints than he told all the other children in Flauerling put together.

Alois believed everything the priest told him, and fitted God and the Saints into his dreams as if they were made on purpose for them. The priest said Alois must obey his parents, love his neighbours, go to church regularly, and all would be well with him. None of these were out-of-the-way tasks for Alois. He had not much option about obeying his parents; they would have thrashed him well if he hadn't. It was easy to love his neighbours, because they loved him already; and to go to church regularly was nothing but a pleasure.

Alois loved to think about angels, the Virgin Mary, and the Child Jesus, who was a little different from God, but not very much; and he thought the Holy Ghost, brooding over the face of the waters, must be very like a group of larches, which, in the spring, hung poised above the valley with plumage like a bird's, as if they were about to fly down the mountain-side; only, like the Holy Ghost, they didn't fly, they just hung there, brooding.

When Alois dressed and undressed his little brothers and sisters, he would sometimes pretend to himself that he was the Virgin Mary and they were Christ Children—though they rarely behaved as such.

Although Alois was such a dreamer, he was familiar with the main facts of life, and accepted them without any great difficulty. He knew how children were born, how men beat their wives, and very often why. All sorts of sordid things, which

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

happen in little mountain villages, took place before his wondering eyes. He knew them, but he did not stay with them; he escaped into his dreams.

'Such things do not concern you,' the priest would say reassuringly; 'they come from the Devil. But God made the world, and it is good.' And then he told Alois that not even a sparrow could fall to the ground without the care of his Heavenly Father, and made him learn by heart the parable of the Good Shepherd.

Sometimes Alois had an uncomfortable feeling, because he knew that sparrows did fall uncared for to the ground, and that lost sheep were not always found. When he ventured to lay these facts before the priest, the priest said, 'You can't expect to understand everything at your age!'

'Beasts are good and men hurt them,' Alois thought to himself, 'but if men are good, God will not hurt them!' And he repeated this cheerful axiom to the priest, who agreed with him, but to Alois's surprise, not very readily.

On All Souls' Day everyone in Flauerling went to church in the morning, and afterwards in a procession to the cemetery to lay flowers on their lost ones' graves.

The priest went with them carrying the Host, and Alois, dressed in a scarlet cassock and short white cotta, walked in front of the priest, waving a thurible.

The crocuses were out; tall and pale lavender, they thronged the meadows before the first snows fell. The larches had already burned themselves away till only the ghosts of them were left. But the slim birches had kept their leaves, and changed them to bright gold.

Alois could not see the candles burning on the graves, because of the sunshine. He thought that the dead souls were like the little flames of the candles, burning there in the very presence of their dear ones; and that love, like light, made them invisible.

After the service the village housewives went home to see to their dinners, but everyone else stood about in the street with their best clothes on, because it was such a great Feast Day, and no-one needed to work. Only the animals had to be attended to as usual.

LOST

After Alois had given the children their wonderful Feast-Day dumplings with bacon in them, and roasted apples with hot honey sauce, his father said to him: 'Hohe Mund has a nightcap on. There will be snow falling in an hour or two. Go up to the Alpe and bring back the sheep. Mind you, if you dare come back till you've found them all, if there's so much as that cursed little black lamb, which dropped out of season, missing, I'll beat the flesh in strips off your bones!'

His father seldom spoke much more pleasantly than that, so Alois set off undisturbed, whistling gaily, with a stick in his hand.

The sun still shone a little to the left of the Hohe Mund, but it had a sickly, staring look, and ragged clouds streamed away from it in all directions.

The valley was covered by a harsh light, as if a curse had suddenly been laid on it, which dulled the smooth green floor, and made it look shrivelled and broken by coarse wrinkles.

Alois's way lay through pine woods. Sometimes between their bare stems he could look straight into his beloved valley and see the river gliding away into the staring sun. The woods were dark and sodden, and very still. Not a squirrel dashed up a tree-trunk nor a bird called. The trees seemed waiting for something unwelcome which they knew would come.

Halfway through the woods Alois came to a break in the trees where there was a small lake called 'the Buchen Pool'. After sunset people were afraid to go near this pool, for once three drunken youths had offered to walk through it for a bet, and none were seen alive again.

Alois gave a hasty glance at its unruffled darkness, and hurried past the Buchen pool and out onto the open slopes of the meadows.

There was no place in his world which Alois loved more than the Buchen meadows. They stretched away, so wide and so open, covered with silver birches. He could find the first snow-rose there and the last crocus. Close above their slopes towered the Hohe Mund, whose heavy head was now plunged deep in cloud, and, sheer below the meadows, shone Napoleon's white road. It looked as if Alois could have dropped a pebble into it.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

A shrill wind blew from the north, and the silver birches stripped themselves in it of all their golden leaves. The air was filled with the rapid chattering of their last flight.

Alois stood among the slender, shaken trees, and called to his sheep. 'Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!' His high voice ran along the wind and was blown back into his face again.

Then he listened, as still as any stone, for their answering bells. It would be quite easy to distinguish the sound, for the cows were already in their stable, and only his father's sheep had the right to graze in the land above the Buchen meadows.

The sun sank with a sudden plunge behind the Hohe Mund, and took with him all but the palest light. Snow began to fall very slowly in great flakes, travelling uncertainly in the hurrying air. The wind rushed out with sudden howls and shrieks of rage from the side of the mountain, as if it were chained to the Hohe Mund, and could only run, to and fro like an angry dog, the length of its chain. The torn leaves mingled with the snow-flakes, and from the valley came the deep sound of the church bells.

Alois knew them all; the biggest and deepest came from the town, but each scattered village had its separate voice.

For a long time Alois could hear nothing but the roar of the wind, the chattering of the flying leaves, and the deep undertone of the valley bells. But he was so accustomed to silence that his hearing was marvellously keen; first, he separated in his mind all the different bells, and then through their many voices, faint in the roar of the wind at last he heard the far-away tinkling of his own sheep-bells. With a heart filled with joy and relief, he bounded off through the fast-fading light in the direction of the sound.

'They will be all together,' he thought, 'and I can lead them home before the wind falls and the snow grows thick!'

But when he reached the meadow where the sheep were still trying to graze, he could not find them all. The sheep knew his voice and hurried to meet him, but he could only count ten where there should be twelve. The little black lamb and its mother were missing.

The wind dropped like a stone. The snow began to fall faster

LOST

and thicker; even silence seemed buried by it—buried as deep as sound.

Alois hurried to the edge of the pine woods and called and called, with all his anxious heart in his voice, but no friendly tinkling came back to him through the muffled air. He remembered the parable of the Good Shepherd—who left his safe sheep to find the one that was lost—and drove the ten sheep quickly into the woods making a pen of fallen boughs to fold them in.

It was so dark when he had finished that he began to be afraid he would never find the black lamb and its mother. But he struggled on, calling and listening, calling and listening. The snow blinded his eyes and filled his mouth. He ran back to the Buchen meadows, where there was still a little light, and the wind still moaned. The leaves tore past him as if they were trying to get back onto the trees again. He went close to the mountain, where the wind roared at him in sudden gusts of passionate anger, as if Alois were its bitter enemy. There was no other sound. He beat his way back slowly to the windless quiet of the woods.

At last he heard a faint tinkling from where he thought the Buchen pool must lie. Alois couldn't help wondering if it was a real tinkling or just a false sound, to lure him to the pool's edge, within reach of the dead men's arms. But he reminded himself that it was All Souls' Day, and the dead had flowers on their graves. They would hardly, he thought, play him such a dirty trick, when he had filled the air with incense for them. So he pushed bravely through the trees in the direction of the sound, and there he found the sheep close to the pool. The mother had neither been able to leave her lamb nor carry it, so she had pressed her poor woolly back against him to protect him from the north wind, and just waited patiently.

Alois felt very much like the Good Shepherd as he wrapped his old cloak about the lamb and felt it snuggle its cold nose into his neck and bleat for joy, while the mother plodded faithfully along at his heels.

He could guess by the sound of the valley bells where he was, but it was more difficult to know where to find his sheep. He

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

fought against the snow, fell among roots of trees and barked his shins against their trunks—but all the time he clutched the black lamb close.

His head felt heavy and confused, and he thought that the souls of the dead were jostling each other along the pathways of the air. They pushed against him as they passed, and were as cold as ice.

At last he heard, far away, the bleating of his penned-in sheep, and after that it was an easy matter to find them. But it was not so easy to take them home once they had been found! The snow had fallen so thickly by now that Alois could not feel his way back to the path; all the wood was packed with snow, and all the air was full of it.

The bells in the valley had stopped ringing, and there was no sound but the heavy breathing of his struggling sheep and the anxious tinkling of their bells.

Alois plunged first this way and then that. The black lamb in his arms weighed like a stone. He wondered if the Good Shepherd had ever put the lost sheep down.

Alois was not sure whether hours or minutes dragged at him while he tried in vain to find the path. It seemed to him as if the sheep began to bleat reproachfully, as if they thought he was nothing but a hireling shepherd after all.

Only the old mother trusted him, plodding along close to his heels, because he carried her lamb.

When he had given up all hope and was just drowsily pushing on through the pine stems, to keep from falling, he stopped suddenly, for he knew by the firm feel under his feet that the path was found. Hope burned in him then, but his strength was failing; he had to use all there was to keep on calling and encouraging his poor sheep. For if it was hard for him to lift his long legs through the snow, it was much harder for the sheep. Once they came to the place in the woods where the trees thinned, and, looking down, Alois could see the lights sparkling in the valley, but his eyes were so dim with the beating snow, and the weight of the lamb was so like a stake fastening him into his own foot-steps, that he could find no spark of answering joy.

LOST

The moon overhead tore through fierce cloud-wrack like a battered ship, sucked down continually by gigantic waves. The snow hid all the stars; but those faithful lights beneath his feet—the stars of his dream cities—burned on.

At last a chalet loomed up suddenly, solid against vaporous darkness. There was a sound of voices and a burst of light all round them.

They were just outside their own inn, and Alois, who was famished and as weak as a frozen bird, would have fallen, all stiff and cold, with the lamb still hugged to his breast, if his kind old neighbour Spiegel had not caught him in his arms.

Alois heard Spiegel's voice louder than any bells:

'Neighbour Heiss! Neighbour Heiss! Here's your lost child with all his sheep! You don't deserve to get him back again—sending him out on such a night as this!'

Perhaps it was this rebuke which made his father angry, or perhaps anger was the only paternal feeling his father had ever known, for he caught Alois out of Spiegel's arms and shook him, as if he had not been shaken enough by the storm.

'Ah! you good-for-nothing!' his father shouted. 'Where have you been all this while, keeping us out of our warm beds hunting for your worthless carcass?'

Alois tried to speak, but his lips and cheeks were so stiff with the cold that no sound came. The black lamb dropped out of his clenched arms, and he fell back limp against his father's shoulder.

'Worm! Idiot! You ate too much for your dinner!' shouted his father, and he shook him again.

His mother came rushing out, but she, too, started cursing Alois; her maternal instinct had been very much alarmed, and being frightened always made her angry with the cause of her fright.

Neighbour Spiegel started cursing as well, but he cursed Alois's parents instead of Alois, till the air rang with curses, drowning the bleating of the sheep.

Alois's whole soul rose to his lips; he gave a loud cry, and for a moment they stopped to listen to him.

'But, Father,' Alois shouted, 'I brought them all back, like you told me; I brought them every one!'

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

This seemed to annoy his father more than anything, for he seized the stick out of Alois's hand and began to beat him unmercifully, and as the cruel blows went on falling Alois's soul darkened in him. He had done all he could; the sheep were saved; God was not satisfied!

Without a sound he slipped from his father's clutch on to the snow, and the darkness swallowed him.

'You have beaten him enough,' said Frau Heiss, and she picked up the child and carried him indoors, leaving the two men to go on quarrelling.

She poured spiced wine between Alois's lips and wrapped him in hot blankets and put the black lamb back between his arms, so that they could help to warm each other.

But Alois knew none of these things; he only knew that when he woke up something was dead in him.

After that night he began to behave more like other people. He answered curses with curses and blows with blows. Nor did he care very much when they took the black lamb he had saved to the butcher's.

'What have they done to the child?' the priest asked himself sorrowfully. 'They have driven God out of him!' And he felt for the first time quite alone in the village.

His father noticed no difference in Alois, but his mother, who was more sensitive, noticed the change with great satisfaction. 'At last my boy Alois has become like other children,' she said to her neighbour; 'he seems more at home in the world. You should see him knock the younger ones about!'

A year or two later Alois went down into his shining valley.

He began to take cows and calves to sell at the market town, and when he had sold them well he came back drunk, and when he had sold them badly he came back sober.

But, drunk or sober, he never had any more dreams.

THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE

*'Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.'*

Miss Harriet Manners wasn't really very old. Many ladies no older than she was were still pinning vague hopes on face-lifting and the lowering of weight; or having incredible things done for their finger-nails and what was left of their hair.

Miss Harriet had only the gentlest of laughs for such queer antics. She had settled down to age as if she found it very pleasant company.

She belonged in spirit, if not in time, to the really Early Victorians. Art could still go no further for her than well-draped youths and maidens in Roman togas, obviously blessed and chaperoned, and betraying very mild leanings toward domesticity. As for religion, it was written all over her in an unexaggerated way.

If you had looked at Miss Harriet's neat but very insignificantly presented person, dressed always in clothes without the remotest connection with either fashion or vanity, you would have guessed that not only had she lived in the country all her life, but you would have known which country. You would have envisaged the ivy-covered Norman church, the thatched cottage down the lane, the small, impeccable garden with a tendency toward specially modest flowers—pansies and demure red daisies—and you would have quite rightly anticipated the exquisite cleanliness inside her little house.

There was a kind of refined but ferocious malice in the way in which Miss Harriet dealt with anything that could defile the shining order of her home. Dirt had no more chance with her than a mouse has with a cat. She didn't 'keep' a maid. No maid

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

now-a-days would have devoted herself with sufficient ardour to that tireless chase; but she had a woman 'in'! This woman had a nervous, highly strung temperament, bent on defeating something at great personal expense. After she had gone, Miss Harriet finished things off.

'I think these little final touches', Miss Harriet would say apologetically, when one caught her painting her domestic lilies, 'should always be done by the lady of the house herself!'

Miss Harriet was by nature apologetic, incredibly gentle, and always retiring when there was anything to retire from. Her speech was tentative and carefully skirted either curiosity or exaggeration. No brute could have been rude to her; he would have found her courtesy more ruthless than brutality, and much more inflexible. You would have had to know her very well indeed before you grasped that behind that meek façade lurked a lion's heart.

'I think there is always something to be said for the other side,' I heard Miss Harriet announce one day, almost under her breath, after listening with great uneasiness to a sharp attack upon a neighbour's morals; 'and I think that it is right to say it!' And there and then, in a voice of silvery gentleness, and with that air of being willing to waive any personal advantage, she put to rout forever the vulgar version of her neighbour's sins.

I knew her for a year before I discovered that far from never having put foot outside her native village, she had lived in Russia for over thirty years. It was beyond belief—but it was true. In spite of the pansies and the daisies, in spite of her slightly cowed attitude in the face of butcher boys, Miss Harriet had flown—in her early, circumscribed and muffled youth—straight into the arms of an impassioned Russian!

She was married in her own village church, dressed in white muslin with a blue sash, and carrying in her hand a brand-new prayer-book bound in white ivory with a gilt clasp, which, she explained, it had been extremely difficult to keep clean, for two and a half months, in a Bolshevik prison.

After their marriage they had gone for their honeymoon to Bournemouth.

On her return from Russia, Miss Harriet had reverted to her

THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE

maiden name, because, although she was now quite safe and had regained her British nationality, one never quite knew what might happen, so that she preferred to be known as Miss Harriet Manners and not to talk about Russia very much.

It had all been rather dreadful, she admitted, but one must remember that the peasants, too, had had a good deal to put up with—and had put up with it for a very long time. And quite nice people as well, who thought things should be different, had had worse things to put up with still.

But, she assured me, the really cruel people weren't the Russians themselves, they were almost always Letts. Of course the Russians—Bolsheviks, if they must be called names—employed the Letts; and they did want the cruel things done because they had a principle about it, and principles are inclined to make even the best people vindictive!

One must remember, if one wanted to be fair, that the prisons and the dreadfulness, even the typhus, had always been the same. You could call them Russian Tsarists or you could call them Bolsheviks, but whatever you called them they remained Russians, and what they did when they were upset was what they had always done.

The famine, too, made everything worse. One did not judge anyone quite the same after one had lived through a famine.

Miss Harriet's husband had died at the outbreak of the Revolution, that rather wild, rather gay time, when all broad-minded, kind-hearted people were feeling quite glad about it, although they didn't want, of course, anything to happen to the poor Tsar and his family.

The peasants were now going to be properly treated, and intelligent people could say what they thought, and everyone could be friends all round.

Well—naturally, perhaps—that hadn't lasted! But one didn't know if it might not have lasted had there been no outside interference, no 'White armies', no badly organized but desperately anxious endeavours on the part of the old, fantastically rich despots to get back.

'You see, dear,' Miss Harriet explained, while she handed me bread and butter and pressed homemade gooseberry jam upon

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

me, 'those Whites had always had everything their own way, without even having to think about it. My dear husband and I, for instance—well—we had the best there was, and never any difficulty in getting it. And there seemed a—a kind of precipice between us and the moujiks. They weren't at all, you know, like our kind village people. I can't really explain to you exactly what moujiks were like. They lived in such a very poor way, and however anxious you were to be kind to them, you could not talk to them very much. The Revolution hadn't really anything to do with the peasants at first, but I used sometimes to think our friends the Whites thought it had. It was such a pity to believe that the Bolsheviks could be stupider than the Whites were themselves, because that was quite unlikely! I dare say you have noticed, my dear, you are so exceedingly well read, that Revolutionists are often quite intelligent, or else they would not have become Revolutionists, would they? My dear White friends would make their plots and talk them over in rooms full of spies, and often even with the spies themselves, so that one cannot think it surprising that the counter-revolution failed. It is a little unfortunate, too, isn't it, that despots will always try to get back and do all over again the kind of things for which they were driven away? And then the people who drove them away get despotic too, in order to stop them, and all their beautiful ideas turn into anger and pain!

'But at first the Revolution wasn't like that, it was—though people never understand my saying so, and it does sound a little irreverent—almost like heaven! No-one had very much to eat, but there was the feeling of spring in the air, and as if everything hard and cold that separated one person from another was being melted like the ice and snow on the Neva! That is why, after my dear husband died, I stayed on.

'My dear husband had been a very rich man, so that if there were to be bad times, it seemed only right to remain and share them. But of course one had supposed that the bad times would be only poverty and—well—famine, you know, and just the usual illnesses and things, and one hadn't really thought about prisons. Everyone in the little town we lived in was friendly to us.

THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE

'It was quite a mistake, you know, my being swept into prison, that first time, with a very great many other people—who had done nothing wrong. That is what we used to call them—"Sweeps". We would hear that the Cheka was being especially active, and that we might expect a "Sweep", and then in the middle of the night (for they always came then) soldiers would bang at the door and go through everything in the house. They would collect all our things in a very untidy heap in the hall, and take away what they liked; and if they had orders, of course they took people away too.

'I was staying in Moscow with some friends the first time I was taken. It came out afterwards, when we were brought before the Cheka, that a very dear young friend of mine had rather lost his head, and had accused me to them of being a foreign spy. He had been in prison himself, twice, poor fellow, and was hardly accountable for what he said. I am sure he must have felt very much ashamed of himself afterwards. His dear mother cried terribly in the passage when they took me away, and filled my basket full of things to eat—all they had in the house, I feel sure!

'What one really minded most was having to dress with two very large men in the room. One of them was a Lett with a big nose, and I must confess, though he turned out much pleasanter afterwards, that he had a very truculent manner. They stood at the door all the time I was putting on my things. It was quite usual, of course, but one didn't like it! They had fixed bayonets (I think the expression is "fixed", isn't it?) in their hands, and when I was nearly ready they poked me with them—with the bayonets, you know—I thought it rather rough.

'It was very cold outdoors, snow on the ground and such a white, sharp moon! They were very big men, and I found it difficult to keep up with them. I didn't know quite what was going to happen, but I thought to myself: "It is better to be kind to them. After all, poor things, I dare say they think they're doing their duty!" So I said to the Lett (the one with the big nose, you know, and I don't know how many days it must have been since he had shaved!): "I am sure you mean no harm, but I don't think you should poke people with bayonets, it doesn't seem very nice. It does not really help me to hurry along either.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Are you a Christian?" And he answered: "Whether I am or not has nothing to do with you! Anyhow, Christ was the first Revolutionary!"

"I said—to humour him, you know, and because perhaps what he said was partly true, Christ did upset the synagogues, and said some very surprising things, too, didn't He?"—"Yes, but I don't think our dear Lord was ever unkind or rough. I have done nothing wrong, but if I had, you should remember Christ was merciful to sinners."

"He didn't answer that, but after a moment or two I felt his hand come through my arm in the dark, and he took my basket, which was very heavy, for I had put into it all I could—a change of clothes, you know, as well as food—and my prayer-book—and he carried it for me all the way to the prison door—so kind, I thought!

"These little friendly things used to happen all the time then; of course even more with the Russians themselves, who are extremely good-natured, while Letts, poor things, do seem rather naturally ferocious! It made a great deal of difference. I am told now that while the physical conditions are cleaner and better, there are no more of these special kindnesses. You will have another piece of sponge cake, won't you?"

"Yes, dear, it is quite true, the prisons were dreadful! I don't think the reports of them have been at all exaggerated. There were a great many of us in there, and all sorts of people!

"I met a Princess once, in a black velvet dress with a long train. She wore white kid gloves and pearl earrings, and I met her in a—kind of lavatory. We knew each other. I had seen her last at a most beautiful evening reception held at her house; and she cried a little. I never saw her again.

"In my cell there was a poor woman who was very uncontrolled. It was just after the ukase against vodka. She was going to have a birthday, and her husband, who had to take a business journey, warned her on no account to try to smuggle vodka into the house for her party, or there would be the Devil to pay! Well, she was a very ignorant and foolish woman—she disobeyed her husband. The next day a spy came in and pretended to be a friend of her husband's, and brought her birthday

THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE

greetings and a nice little present of ham, and she gave him a glass of the vodka. She was arrested that night and what was very terrible was that she had to be shot. Her husband sent her little children to break it to her.

'You see, when you are to die in prison it is usual to send to a dear one this message: "I wish you a long life!"—that is to warn you that you are going to die, and to show you at the same time that you are truly loved.

'When she saw her three little children through the grille, they said: "Father told us to tell you that he wished you a long life!" So she knew! Poor thing, she had hysterics and screamed all day long and all night, and the next morning they took her out—and shot her.

'I was only in prison two weeks that time, in a cellar under a room where the Cheka held their meetings. No, dear, no-one was at all unkind to me, but when I looked at the walls I saw that they moved—yes, it was vermin—that was what was so very unpleasant. It gave people typhus, because, you see, those dreadful little insects carried the infection. It was better not to sleep at night, so that you could prevent them from biting you. What was I saying?—Yes. I pointed the walls out to the guard, but all he said was—very gently, as if he were sorry for all of us—"Nothing can be done about it!"

'They allowed our friends to send us in food. If they hadn't, we couldn't, you see, have lived, because all they had to give to us was a very little bad bread and hot water, with sometimes the tail or the head of a herring floating in it.

'Cold? Oh, yes, dear, very cold, of course. Stone floors and no heating, but a little straw to sleep on—when you got used to its not being very clean.

'What we learned was to rub the back of one's lungs quite hard with one's hands—it helps one very much, you'll find; but I hope you'll never be as cold as that!

'It wasn't those things one really minded. One can get used to cold, and to not having very much to eat; and poor rough people can be wonderfully kind. It was the dirt, dear, and the—the things one had to empty—and the things one couldn't! The yard where we were allowed to take our exercise—well—it was

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

used for emptying things—so if you walked there at all, you had to hold your nose all the time, and if you didn't walk you got rather stiff.

In the middle of the night, after I had been there two weeks, the guards came and called out my name. They said that I was free! You see, they had looked through all my things by then, and found nothing against me; and I said: "I beg your pardon, but might I stay where I am until the morning?" I was a little afraid of going out into the dark, in the middle of the night, not knowing my way, and it was so very cold; but they said, "No—I must go at once," and everybody in the cellar laughed at my not wanting to go free! They liked little jokes like that, you know, it helped to pass the time.

My second imprisonment was much worse than the first, because now of course one knew what it was like; and then it looked as if I really must be executed this time, on account of Archangel and that very tiresome expedition Mr. Winston Churchill thought we ought to make; so, as I was English, they explained to me I should probably be shot, but they wouldn't do it at once, which was very nice of them, I thought, because if the expedition failed they wouldn't mind my being alive.

I was frightened at first, but you can't go on being frightened for two months, can you? Besides, I very soon said to myself: "Really, this is absurd! You can't mind death when your husband is dead" (not, in a sense, did I mind it, but there was the unseemliness), "and it is no worse for you than for anyone else. The poor people who shoot don't like it at all. They only do it because they must!" And so I made up my mind once and for all to make it as easy for them as possible. "All you've got to do," I said to myself, "is to be kind and quiet—up to the end!" And after I had decided that—it was a great relief to me. For really, you know, what one is afraid of is one's own behaviour, isn't it?—not to behave quietly and as becomes an English gentlewoman—I should have minded that!

I interrupted her to say: 'I don't think you need have minded that, it couldn't have happened to you.'

Miss Harriet blushed a little. 'I hope not, dear, I'm sure,' she said, 'because one has had great privileges. I used to try to help

THAT FOR AN HERMITAGE

the others when their time came. It is interesting, of course, to have gone through such experiences, because one knows now what there is to mind—not really, you know, as much as one supposes. As long as one just goes on being ready and cheerful—! And they shoot as quickly as they can, I believe! I don't think, you know, that anybody really likes killing another person!

'I hope you don't think I am unfair or silly, not to talk more often about those things here? When I first came back from Russia, I found that people didn't understand. They either said: "How thrilling! do tell us all about it!" and although perhaps in a sense you could call it thrilling, it wasn't a very nice kind of thrill—or else they said: "Oh, yes! you were through the Revolution, weren't you?—it must have been horrid!"—and it was, you see, so many other things besides horrid. You cannot blame people at such a distance for not understanding it. Even some of the people who were in the Revolution seemed not always to take it in. That kind English chaplain, you know, who did a great many useful things, I feel sure, to help his fellow country people, was very angry when the Cheka kept him waiting! He said to me, "Please tell them when they come in" (I was waiting for my final sentence) "that I can't stay here any longer; I'm a busy man and they've taken up an hour of my time!" I don't think English clergymen quite understand Revolutions, do you?

'It was a great surprise when they told me I was free. At first I didn't know quite what to do, because having married a Russian, I couldn't go back with the other English. It rather looked as if there was only to be that one train allowed—and time went very quickly—and as if I couldn't go home at all. No-one could help me. What with one thing and another, I was rather tired and ill, and I knew if I went back to prison again, I should die. But one day I met an old friend of my husband's who had influence with the Cheka, and he got my permit signed for me just in time to catch the train. So I was able to come home after all, and although I had been away from England for such a long time, it seemed very natural—just as if I had never been away!

THE WHITE TULIP

The hollyhocks stood so high above her head that they might have been angels.

Angels, Prue knew, were to be found in gardens. Those flashing distant spires of wine-red and shell-pink might be either the Angelic Presences themselves or only their flaming swords. Prue was not sure what swords were like, but she knew they flamed.

The garden stretched to the World's End; and all the trees were either Trees of Knowledge or of Life.

It was Prue's birthday and she was three years old. She wore a blue sunbonnet and a new pair of socks striped pink and white. She had just shown them to Brown the gardener, and he had been properly impressed by their beauty.

When Prue demanded, 'Do you think God has got such nice socks as these?' Brown had burst into an explosion of meaningless laughter.

But Prue did not mind Brown's laughter: she knew well enough when people laughed to make her feel silly, or when they laughed because they were themselves a little silly.

Brown was a benevolent semi-Deity, but he wasn't grander than Prue, nor even quite so grand.

He came in her prayers after the Family, but before Bob the Airedale.

When Brown stopped laughing, he took his hands off his spade and said: 'Now look-er here, baby!' and Prue put her hand into his gnarled and fascinating paw—dark brown with earth, and streaked by gravel—and looked. Brown had been planting a new flower. It stood in a bare space of earth, lonely in its tall grandeur. Prue's eyes followed with awe the long firm green stem, out of which the knife-shaped leaves stood guard beneath

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

a white cup. The cup had petals as white as snow and as firm as ivory, and in its centre was a heart of gold.

The sun shone on it; and the blue sky leaned down to cover it.

Prue thought the sky was the ceiling of the garden and no less solid than the earth. It wouldn't have surprised her at all to find herself walking about in blue air and playing with small lazy clouds.

But the flower surprised her; she had not thought even in fairyland of a flower as beautiful as this.

It was so brave—so white and gold—and its petals were so flawlessly fine! It did not bend or scatter itself on the breeze, or give itself away by so much as a wandering scent.

Prue clutched in dizzy ecstasy at Brown's hand. She did not ask the flower's name, but dancing on the tips of her toes before it, she flung her eagerness into the air with an ardour beyond all speech.

'It's a white tulip,' Brown explained proudly. 'I got the Prize for 'im! and seeing it's your birthday, I thought you might like to have 'im for your own! But 'e needs waterin', them bulbs are steady drinkers. If you don't water 'em, they'll die on your 'ands!

'Now them marigolds over there by the dining-room window—all they ask is gravel. But these bulbs is upper class and chancy like you, baby—they 'as to 'ave the best of everything! Now I'm off to my dinner. You won't come to no 'arm here till Nurse comes for you. But mind you don't go picking any of my begonias!' and Brown withdrew his hand, only to receive a blue-bonneted avalanche about his knees. Prue flung herself against those corduroy bulwarks, rich with the flavour of the earth, in a passion of gratitude, and had to be picked off them like a limpet.

Brown escaped at last. Prue found herself alone, in the big still garden, with the white tulip.

Prue was not a child who minded being left alone. She recognized no enmity in the Universe. She accepted everything that came along as a fresh pledge of rapture. People were rapture—animals were rapture—and flowers were a different, a more delicate and deliberate form of rapture. They couldn't do things

THE WHITE TULIP

with you, but what you could do with them was of course infinite.

They began plainly before your eyes, and then, entering into your heart of hearts, became whatever you asked of them. They never interfered, as dogs did, by knocking you down. Nor did they ever call you in to tea.

Theirs was the Kingdom of Heaven; the Power; and the Glory.

Undisturbed and ecstatic, the life of Prue's mind swept over the white tulip. The white tulip did nothing to repudiate this storm of imagination, neither did it respond to it. It continued its unblinking intercourse with the impersonal sky.

It was noon, and the garden was hot and silent. A golden bee stirred the air, close to Prue's ear—and in a chestnut tree a thrush called warningly. The stable cat had got into the garden.

Brown's words slipped suddenly into Prue's mind with a stab of fear:

'They needs water. If you don't water 'em, they'll die.'

Prue had no very plain image of death in her mind, but she guessed it was a thing which shouldn't happen to flowers. Perhaps if it did they would feel as she did when Nurse combed her curls roughly, or when dear inanimate things broke in her hands and left her soul defeated.

The white tulip must never know defeat! It must be saved from blind hot tears, and that deadly constriction of the bereaved, marauding heart. Prue felt herself, with another, longer stab of triumph, there to save it.

She looked all around her cautiously and a little guiltily, for silence and loneliness were lawless allies. She might have to do wrong to save the white tulip; and it was terrible, and yet a great relief, to know that there was no-one in the garden to stop her. God, no doubt was there, but Prue knew of old that He only looked on.

Across the terrace, under the rose-red garden wall, stood Brown's big watering-can.

It was a green tin monster nearly as large as Prue. It was a forbidden monster; but it held water—and the white tulip must have water or die! Prue set off across the terrace trembling with missionary zeal.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

The terrace was long even without the watering-can. But when Prue had clasped the monster in her arms and set off once more, the terrace became a trackless desert, vast enough to daunt the stoutest Cortez.

The watering-can had an incalculable form, it lunged and banged against every part of Prue's person. Water came out of it unexpectedly in fearful waves from the top—or maliciously in startling jets, from small holes in an expressionless green face.

But with aching, clutching arms, with a queer pounding in the centre of her being which made her breathe as Bob did after miles of rabbit chasing, Prue struggled on.

She got across the terrace and the watering-can got across it with her. The white tulip looked unconscious of her efforts and stared up at the sky without the faintest flicker of approval.

The water, with fiendish ingenuity, ran out of every end of the can at once, half of it over Prue; but it did not scamp the white tulip. A good deal of it soaked into the earth around the delicate flower and splashed those upward-tilting leaves.

The tulip, after a minute or two, gave a strange, sickening lurch to one side and no longer held its white cup straight into blue air. The form of its immortal symmetry was fatally disturbed.

Prue looked at it in a panic of anxiety. Surely—surely—something was wrong with it! Was it a precursor of that terrible word 'Death'? Had the tulip, after all her frantic efforts, and that sensation of successfully surmounted guilt, not had *enough* water?•

It was a desperate business! Away and away stretched the terrace in the burning sun—and Prue looked across it with the eyes of a castaway. Would no-one come to help her fight with that inimical watering-can? No-one stirred. The windows were empty. All mankind was blotted out, eating its dinner in the kitchen.

Far away the stable cat slunk unobtrusively through cabbages on a mission of its own, curiously unlike any desire to save.

Prue dragged the empty watering-can to the spout in the wall.

She grasped the tap and turned and turned, but as she turned it the wrong way, she only succeeded in hurting her hand. At

THE WHITE TULIP

last that hand couldn't be hurt any more and so she tried the other hand, which fortunately turned the tap a different way. Water gushed out enough to flabbergast Moses. Whatever of Prue had failed to be drenched before was drenched now; but she filled the watering-can—and labouring under it as Atlas laboured under the weight of the Universe, Prue tottered back to the white tulip's side.

As she reached her goal the watering-can slipped out of her aching arms, and all the water, in one great rapid tidal wave, engulfed the white tulip.

Prue watched it with her eyes distended by horror. She heard the fine green stem snap. The beautiful white head sank into the mire. The golden heart was turned to mud. There was nothing left of that immaculate splendour but a small dark hole in the untenanted earth.

Prue did not cry. When one has, with one's own hand, killed Beauty, there is no life left in the heart to cry. She only stood there staring with aching eyeballs at the ruin she had made . . .

Brown came back from his dinner and found Prue still staring at a pool of mud and water where his prize tulip had stood.

'Whatever 'ave you bin and done, baby?' he exclaimed, in consternation. 'Why, if you 'aven't gone and watered that tulip to death! You've made a pond of 'e—that you 'ave!—and you all soaked to the skin yourself. 'Ow you could have got that can across from the wall beats me. 'Ere, in you go to Nurse!'

Prue did not blame Brown. God is mysterious, and Brown was half a god. He had said the tulip must be watered to live. He now said the tulip had been watered to death.

But these profound, incalculable misstatements were not the worst of the business. Why had she made herself the agent of the tulip's doom?

Sam, too, slinking through the cabbages, in spite of his light, sophisticated chase, had missed his bird.

Prue, dimly regarding the wreck of her desire, had a foretaste of a deeper woe. Not this once only—but perhaps again—and yet again—she would wreck this vision of Beauty by the hot clutch of a personal desire. God had not warned her of frustration any more than He had warned the stable cat.

THE VOCATION

Malcolm Macgregor was often sent from the front into the nearest town to buy things for his mess.

He was good-natured enough to be safely grumbled at, if he failed to bring exactly what was wanted and had brought instead the nearest thing to it. Besides, he was the only officer left in the K.O.S.B.'s who knew the kind of French the French so inconsiderately speak to English officers.

It was a stuffy September evening. Amiens was full of dust and grit, and people determined to be cheerful, looking as if they had had an insufficient amount of sleep for a long time, but were otherwise nearly normal.

Malcolm strolled into a well-known café for his dinner and witnessed a little scene which might, in a more easily excitable place, have had a livelier ending.

A French officer had made an appointment with one lady; and was breaking it at the last moment in favour of a more amusing type.

There was nothing unusual in this manœuvre. If you are not going to live very long, you naturally want to make the best use of your time; but the way the discarded lady took it was unusual.

She stood stiffly, close to where her rival was sitting. Her hands, in white cotton gloves, were folded neatly just below the breast. She gave a funny, rather stately little bow, and glided toward the door.

She had to pass close to Malcolm in order to leave the café, and he found himself staring at her, as if she were his dead mother.

She was a little frumpy, dowdy woman: not made up, except for one poor streak of carmine, badly set, across her lips; and she was dressed like the good ladies who work in parishes among the poor.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

The other girl laughed.

Malcolm found himself saying quickly:

'Madame, I think this is your table, you would be doing me an honour if you would dine with me?'

The discarded lady turned, bowed graciously, and said, 'Monsieur is too kind', then she sat down opposite him. She spoke beautiful, cultivated French, the kind she oughtn't to have known existed. She behaved just like a lady, a rather shy provincial lady, at an evening party.

She talked to him about the cathedral.

She said it was a great privilege to have one so perfect in the place, and a mercy it was not more damaged.

She asked Malcolm if he knew any of the English cathedrals; she had heard they were very beautiful—not Catholic, of course, which was a pity, but then they might become so! The Entente, she thought, might have that beneficial result. Malcolm was a Scotch Presbyterian, but he said he thought the Entente might turn England Catholic. He said it without turning a hair. By that time he didn't think there were any impossibilities left.

They talked about cathedrals all through dinner. She was hungry, but she ate very gracefully, and not at all fast. She had black coffee afterwards without a liqueur, and no wine.

When it was over, Malcolm had the worst moment of his life. The cathedral at that hour was shut, and he didn't know where else to suggest taking her. He hadn't the heart to say 'Good-evening', and let her go away alone.

He didn't know what she expected either, or how to tell her what he did. Not under the worst bombardment had he ever felt more inclined to run away.

'Madame,' he said, 'it would be a great privilege, if you are not occupied, to converse with you a little, for, as you know, we have not often the pleasure of a lady's society. It is too noisy here, but I fear I know nowhere to suggest for our conversation?'

She smiled at him, in a kind of motherly way, half irony, half laughter, a way Frenchwomen have.

'But that, Monsieur, is what I am here for,' she said. 'Of

THE VOCATION

course you will come to my little room—opposite the cathedral—you will have a very good view of it, from my window. I find it most convenient for early Mass—and there we will talk as much as you like.’

Malcolm felt worse than ever then, but he followed her out into the broad dry street between the plane trees. It was a quiet evening—what wind there was went toward the front and carried off the sound of the guns—you could only hear them faintly like light summer thunder, after a hot day.

She glided along beside Malcolm as quiet as a ghost. She was dressed in grey, with a little shapeless black hat like a bonnet, and she wore very square-toed shoes, rather shabby, with no heels to them.

Her room was as spotless and clean as a convent cell. There was a big window looking out across the cathedral square, with a great box of red geraniums on the sill.

Above the bed was a crucifix and a tiny holy-water stoup set at the feet of a china Virgin and child. A cross cut out of a blessed palm hung over them.

She sat down opposite Malcolm by the window, with her hands folded on her lap. He had never known a woman keep so still, she didn’t move an eyelid.

There was a pause which seemed as if it would never end. He knew that she was looking at him carefully and attentively and trying to make him out; he was looking at the geranium box and hoping she would succeed without his having to tell her what he didn’t want.

Then she said, very quietly, ‘Am I right in supposing that Monsieur simply wishes to converse with me this evening?’

Of course, Malcolm felt a fool—but he felt a relieved fool.

‘Yes, Madame,’ he said quickly, ‘if I am not asking too much of your good-nature.’

She gave the little haunting smile again and said:

‘Oh, no, Monsieur—you are asking the least of it. I wonder what you would care to talk about? We have the habit of never alluding to the war—unless those who are unhappy wish to speak of it; and if I asked you questions about your home life—I might appear indiscreet. Choose your own subject then.’

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

'It was my own fear, Madame,' Malcolm explained, 'that I might be indiscreet—and yet I confess that nothing would interest me so much—if you permitted it—as if you would tell me your own story. Tomorrow or the day after, I may be dead. I mention this as a recommendation for a confidence, but in any case your story would be safe with me.'

'Many things would be safe with you, Monsieur,' she said, 'that would not be safe with others. I am quite willing to tell you my little history. There is no secret in it, for the only names that should not appear I shall not mention—not from lack of confidence in you, but because I long ago made a vow never to permit myself to mention certain names. It is the one vow I have kept. The other three I broke. Monsieur perhaps knows that the religious make three vows? It is these that I have broken.'

The moment she had spoken, it explained everything. The little gliding walk—only nuns walk like that; her helplessness in the face of sharp discourtesy—she had simply not known how to get away from that table before Malcolm spoke to her; all her incredible dignity, her dreadful clothes—even her stillness! She was a nun, and a woman who has been a nun is never anything else.

'Do not tell me about it, if it pains you,' Malcolm said gently. She smiled at him reassuringly.

'It does not pain me now,' she said. 'Of course, I have not told it often—few would care to hear it, for it is not very gay; fewer would understand it—and it is not easy to tell things to those who do not understand. You will readily imagine that the story of my life is not part of my *métier*. Nevertheless, Monsieur, for your courtesy, and for something that I see in you which is more than courtesy, I will tell you—just as if you were my father confessor—what has brought me here.'

'I entered a convent when I was seventeen; it was customary in our family (whose name Monsieur will permit me to withhold?) for one daughter to become a religious. There were four of us, and I was the youngest. It appeared to me a very agreeable vocation.

'I spent many happy years in the convent. I was the youngest of all the professed—for after six years I was professed. I

THE VOCATION

became (you know our phrase, perhaps?) a bride of Christ when I was twenty-three.

'After that I was singularly happy for another year. I do not say that it was a wide life—there was the chapel, and the altar—and I worked also in the garden, and at the dispensary—the reverend mother gave me a special kindness—and I loved all my sisters—some I loved better than others—but I think I may say I loved them all. There was never any anger or bitterness in my life—and there was very little regret.

'Our convent was in the South. The spring comes very quickly to the country there. One week all was bare—as bare as the palm of my hand—the mountains were like an empty table, and the trees were stripped of all their leaves. On the ground there were only the dry brown grasses of the dead year—and then, like the spread of a leaping flame, all was transformed. The hills ran emerald, the trees shone green and gold. The fruit blossoms danced like foam, and the ground was alive with flowers—anemones, cyclamen, grape hyacinth, hepaticas, violets, and the gentian that is as blue as the heat of a summer's day.

'We had a beautiful garden belonging to the convent, and many flowers. I became visited with a too great love of beauty. It beset me in my prayers. I could not hold my mind on heaven and the saints—it ran after sunbeams on the chapel walls. I slept little at night, and when I slept I dreamed the names of flowers. The Saint Bruno lilies—which some call the lilies of paradise—haunted me, and the little wild tulips troubled me at Mass-time.

'I thought our mother looked at me curiously, as if she were aware that all was not well with me, but though she loved me, she said nothing. I tried to control my fancies, for they wandered out after all young things. I thought of the birds, and the lambs, and then I thought of children—of very young children.

'I was consumed with the thought of youth.

'My father confessor said nothing against my dreams, except that what was visible would pass away, and that only what was Eternal would remain. But, Monsieur, it did not seem so to me. It was the Eternal that had passed away—the visible remained.

'My prayers turned into an ecstasy. I could not stop praying—but I asked of God and the Blessed Virgin strange things.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

'I was like one who is in a fever and never sees the end of thirst.

'I did not know for what I prayed. I had not thought of any man.

'We were not a visiting sisterhood, but when the village priest, who was also our chaplain, required our services, we gave them. Our convent was in a very out-of-the-way, neglected district, we had to do what we could.

'It happened that I had never been outside the gates before, but one day I was told to accompany one of the older sisters.

'It was Sister Agatha, whose eyes never went beyond the door, whom I was to accompany. Even when she walked in the garden, she looked down at the paths. I think she would not have seen a temptation—her thoughts were so protected. But I was afraid.

'I am often afraid now, Monsieur, but that seems a little thing, and easy to bear, because experience has taught me that everything that happens can be borne. For to everything there is an end—except fear. But in those days nothing had happened to me—it was all, as it were, possible; and it is the possibilities which are the most terrible things in life.

'I was afraid then of walking from the convent to give soup to a sick old woman. Now the soldiers come to me drunk with battle, to hide their horrors in my heart; and I am not afraid.

'On our way back we passed through a little wood. Sister Agatha with her eyes on the path saw nothing; but I saw a peasant lad embrace a girl.

'They stood beneath one of the summer trees, and kissed each other. They did not see us. We passed by them without a sound, and quickly, for we were late for compline, and all that June night I lay awake, and the Eternal had departed from me. I called on all the saints in turn, but no-one heard me.

'I saw only those lovers kissing beneath the summer trees. It did not seem a sinful thing—but, Monsieur—it seemed sweet! It seemed worth fire and pain, worth starvation and cold—it seemed worth looking Death in the face, to clasp and to be clasped in that embrace!

'I knew nothing of human love then; now I know very much—and still it seems sweet and not a sin. Love is profaned every

THE VOCATION

day, and so is God, and we who worship, do not worship Him the less for that. But if it was not a sin for those happy children, it was a sin for me.

'From the first I did not doubt that—but I hid my sin. I could not speak of it. When I tried to confess it, I trembled and my body ran fire.

'For three months all that burning summer-time—I lived with my great sin, and in the autumn I sickened with typhoid.

'I lay on my bed, restless with fever, and wondered if I should die. I had always longed for death before—what else had I to hope for? But now I did not desire it. It seemed to me that I had missed too much. I did not want to die before I had ever lived.

'The reverend mother came to my cell and looked down at me. For a long time she had not spoken to me directly; I knew that she was displeased with me.

'When she spoke at last, she said, "My daughter, I see that within your eyes which should have no existence. It is better that you should die holy than that you should live to regret your vows. I recommend you to die. I shall not send for the doctor, and if you offer up your will in this matter, I shall take it as a sign of grace."

'But I would not. I rose up and demanded to see the doctor, I threatened to call in the nuns to protect me—it was accepted within our rules that we should not be refused medical aid. I implored and I prayed for the right to live. I said if I was so wicked, surely I was too wicked to die!

'For a time I thought the reverend mother would not yield. She stood there like stone. At last she said, "My daughter, without doubt you will go to the hell to which you belong, but if you still wish it, you shall see a doctor, but remember he cannot cure a mortally stricken soul!"

'I was exhausted, but my will was alive—I whispered, "I still wish it," and she left me.

'When the doctor came, the reverend mother entered with him.

'I cried out, "Doctor, if I do not see you alone, I shall die—they want me to die." The reverend mother did not look at me. She said nothing, she stood, with her hands folded, by my

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

bedside. I thought it would be as hard to move her as to push the walls away with my hands.

'But the doctor moved her. He said, "Reverend Mother, I regret it, but I must refer this case to the authorities unless I see her alone." The reverend mother did not like Government authorities; she looked at neither of us, but in a moment she was gone. She moved so quickly that I looked for a long time to see if she was not still there.

'Then I told the doctor everything. I said, "She wants me to die because in my heart I have broken my vows—unless you help me, I shall have to die."

"I shall help you," he told me, "and you will get better—I promise you that." But he did not look at me either. He was I heard afterwards, without faith, but no-one likes a nun who has broken her vows.

'He kept his promise, he helped me to get well. Sister Agatha nursed me; the reverend mother never came to my cell again, but though Sister Agatha nursed me, she did not speak to me—no-one in the convent spoke to me from that hour.

'When I got better, the doctor took me away with him. For the sake of the community they let me go, for they were afraid of the secular authorities. The doctor had communicated with my relations. They sent me money, but they would not see me.

'It was quite natural, for my mother was dead, and my father had married again and had young children. We were an intensely Catholic family, and all my sisters had children. What should they do with a returned nun?

'I had, then, money—and no friends. I did not know what to do, for since I was seventeen, I had done only what I was told. The doctor escorted me to a small hotel in a town some distance from the convent. It was all that it should be, quiet and respectable; then he left me. He told me to be careful to drink only boiled water for a time. I do not think he told me anything else.

'I bought myself clothes, and then one day I took a train and came to Paris. I knew the address of an old friend of my mother's who lived in Paris. *Mon Dieu!* How helpless I was!

'He was very kind to me, but very perplexed. I think he would gladly have married me, but he was a widower with grown

THE VOCATION

children, and they objected, so he made for me other arrangements. It was not what I had meant, but on the whole I learned to adapt myself. It was all I had learned, to obey and to control my feelings. It was a grief that I could have no child, but that again would have caused a difficulty. One can change one's life, if one has the will for it, Monsieur—but one cannot choose it; for that one needs also the will of God.

'The death of my old friend some years later was a great sorrow to me, it was also an inconvenience.

'I had saved something, but not enough to live upon, and I had no friends except a few who were poorer than myself.

'Then the war broke out, and I tried everywhere to be taken as a nurse, for I had had training at the convent as an *infirmière*; but the training stood, as it were, in my way. No-one wanted even in the time of war a nun who had broken her vows—a woman who had lived as I had; wives who had broken their vows—yes—if they could nurse, but a nun—who had lived as I had—No! not if she could work miracles of healing! I prayed all day and half the night for direction. It seemed there must be something that even I could do, to serve France. At last a poor woman told me that she was coming here. She explained that the Government gave certain permits for women of her profession—that the men needed them so much. They came—she told me—out of battle and murder and hideous danger—wild to forget; and they could only forget—forget the sights they had seen, the friends who had fallen, and all the evils of war—they could only forget these evils—in the arms of a woman.

'They who had dared all for us—required us.

'They needed us terribly—not normally—not perhaps rightly—Monsieur will realize that I am no judge of these matters; but I know when I see a human need. At first I was afraid—for I had no experience of men, except of the kind old friend of my mother's, whom I had nursed for many years; but then I said to myself, "What do these men have to face? Torture, fatigue, and death!"

'It did not need many more prayers to show me what to do.

'My friend was already here, and she helped me to make my arrangements.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

'I have been here two years—I refuse no-one. That is my story, Monsieur.'

She told it with many pauses, very gently and quietly—sometimes she smiled, and once or twice she looked at Malcolm anxiously, to see if he understood. But when she paused, he could not speak.

He took her hand in his and kissed it. At last he blurted out something about money—some kind of plan. But she stopped him with a little gesture of her hand.

'Oh, no, Monsieur,' she said. 'You forget. It is my vocation.'

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

Nelly Magnet had an enormous capacity for loving; and it had never been used.

The overflow of it had reached starved kittens, distant preachers, and unresponsive official superiors. Its central stream was concentrated upon a most cantankerous old mother.

Nelly fondly worshipped this acidulated and self-righteous old lady. She would have liked to wait on Mrs. Magnet hand and foot for ever and to turn her youth into a footstool for her. But neither of them could afford this luxury. Mrs. Magnet had 'just enough' without supporting Nelly; so Nelly went into a hospital and supported herself.

It was a glorious existence for Nelly, full of all the opportunities which she most craved.

For twenty years she had developed a passionate longing for making other people comfortable at her own expense.

The secret satisfactions of her heart had been when she succeeded in getting other people into armchairs, without their knowing she was doing it, and with nothing left for herself but something small and spiky in a corner.

Half of Nelly's pleasure would have gone if she had ever been discovered, and all of it, if she had ever had to be made comfortable herself.

Fortunately this never happened.

People did not notice Nelly; they merely accepted things from her.

If there were ten persons in a room and Nelly was one of them, the nine would be remembered and Nelly overlooked. This wasn't because Nelly was very plain. She was merely wholly inconspicuous, and without claims.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

In appearance, she was neither tall nor short, fat nor lean, her brown hair had no noticeable quality, her nose was unexacting as a feature and a little flat. She had a large, sensitive mouth, with none of those delicate curves which are so often inaccurately ascribed to sensitiveness. What colour she had confined itself to the tips of her ears and nose.

She had eaten bad and insufficient food all her life, and she suffered from chronic indigestion.

Her eyes were soft and brown, not very large and never at all bright. Only her hands were beautiful. They were made for swift and perfect service, supple and fine, sensitive and strong, never too hot or too cold—all her brains were at the ends of those unfumbling fingers.

Nelly had to wait three years before any of the big London hospitals would train her. But she learned all that time. Nursing-homes took her; ran her off her feet and drilled her into an astonishing knowledge of how to get things clean, or how, if you were clever enough and lazy enough, to get off without doing so.

She learned how patients died, how scientific people made unscientific mistakes, and pretended that the result of them was an accident. She learned how patients lived very often in spite of these mistakes, because Nature is tough and not easily disheartened.

The people she associated with were hard-working, genial materialists; they didn't take anything too seriously, except their times off: not their profession, nor their futures, nor the helpless human beings left in their efficient, careless hands.

Their consciences were easy and indurated.

They saw too much of the visible to be very much interested in where anything else began; unless it had something to do with table-rapping. They wanted to flirt; marry; and get what they could out of life.

Some of the nurses, on the other hand, were very religious and faddy about churches. They didn't flirt so much, but they were often more spiteful than the lighter types.

Nelly Magnet was a Roman Catholic; she wasn't at all faddy about churches. She obeyed and worshipped wherever and whenever she could.

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

Her love of God was behind everything she thought about; but it never interfered with her thoughts; nor did it interfere with her love of God that, on the whole, most of her prayers were said to the Virgin.

She got a good deal chaffed about her religion. What she ate or didn't eat on Fridays became nearly as much of a joke as her fantastic name.

Every ward in which she nursed rang the changes on magnets and needles without reprieve. The really funny part of the joke was, of course, that she couldn't attract anyone at all—not even an out-patient or a dresser.

Then Nelly took her three years at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital, and at the end of them she won the gold medal.

This was a surprise to everybody, because, although Nurse Magnet had never been in a row, she had never been one of the smart show nurses to whom gold medals naturally fall.

No-one had been jealous of her, nor had she ever received a crumb of professional praise.

No great consultant had ever picked her out for notice, no house surgeon had paid her welcome or unwelcome attentions. No medical student had ever met her eyes, except when they were looking for something which had nothing to do with eyes.

It appeared afterwards that a visiting surgeon had once drawn a momentary attention to her; he had asked the sister with whom he was discussing a risky operation to let him have in the theatre 'that little what-you-may-call-'em with the neat hands'.

The names of the other nurses he knew.

Nelly Magnet got the gold medal simply as a result of the examination, and because when the authorities came to look at it they found her whole record faultless. She was a lucky girl, because there was practically no difference between her profession and her religion.

The matron in their farewell interview looked at Nelly a little dubiously. She had never spoken to her privately since she had accepted her for training.

'Of course, you know you have done very well here,' she said stiffly, and with a visible reluctance, 'but we are afraid we can't offer you a ward. You see, you are a first-rate nurse, but you

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

lack authority and initiative. However, you are young; perhaps you may develop these qualities, and I shall in any case give you a most excellent certificate which is certain to get you a good post. If I were you, I should try to be—well—I don't know how to put it quite, but—a little more aggressive. People in this world don't get things unless they think they ought to have them.'

Nelly flushed and thanked her. She did not expect the matron to shake hands with her; so, after looking at her hard for a moment, the matron decided that it was not necessary.

Nelly didn't expect a husband, or children, or to get her own way. She never thought she could earn more than her daily bread, or that she would ever succeed in really pleasing her mother; and the matron was perfectly right. Nelly didn't obtain any of these things. Plainer women have got husbands, the unmaternal produce children, and the unfilial retain the adoring love of parents; but none of these blessings befell Nelly Magnet.

She merely succeeded in getting a good post at Woolwich in a military hospital.

When the war broke out, she had a right to petition to be sent to the front, which was where she wished to go; but everybody else clamoured past her, trampling on her rights.

She very nearly got pushed into an understaffed civilian hospital and left there for the 'duration', but at the last moment one of the surgeons said, 'I must have a decent nurse for the Service Hospital in London, the new one I'm to take charge of for officers—give me little what-you-may-call-it—she's got a wonderful surgical hand.'

So her hands saved her again, and she went to a large clean palace in the West End, filled from floor to ceiling with badly damaged boys.

It was very different from a big ward of thirty or forty rough Tommies.

Sister Magnet had a room to herself—a wonderful great, light room which had formerly been a drawing-room—a couple of V.A.D.'s under her, and a night sister.

She had only six cases and could spare them her full attention.

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

It was wonderful to pour into twelve hours her enormous concentration, to do so much for so few, instead of so little for so many.

The matron came in twice a day, but she never stayed long in Sister Magnet's ward. There was no need.

Nelly had always had an insatiable love for cleanliness. No portion of her person or her very plain clothes failed in attaining the essence of that primal virtue. She had never had to acquire a taste for it—merely to apply a passion; and now that she had a ward of her own, she applied it.

Her V.A.D.'s, two harried and well-meaning ladies, into whom accuracy and obedience were being shocked and pricked day by day, responded better to Nelly's unyielding gentleness than to the hectic authority of the other sisters.

Nelly was trained and they were not, but she neither sneered nor goaded. She showed them again and again with unvarying, unsharpened patience the beauty of the right handling of inanimate things.

She let them do showy bits, when they could, and when they couldn't, she let them down very easily.

If they were nervous, she reassured them, and if they were presumptuous, she let them see, and then removed, the danger of their presumptions.

'The only thing that matters,' she used to say quietly, but very firmly, 'is the patients' comfort.'

The patients knew this instinctively. They chaffed and flirted, they told broad stories, and joked with all the nurses who liked it (and most of them liked it), but, though at first they treated Sister Magnet to the same loose side of their courage or their exhaustion, one by one they dropped it.

They stopped new men from beginning it with her.

Not that anything they said ever shocked her. She ignored their doubtful chaff with a deep motherliness. 'Now, then, turn', or, 'I'll have the left foot, please', but it didn't somehow suit her. And men are quick to know what suits the women who look after them.

She was the one they told their symptoms to, and their fears.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

The shyest of them (and some of them were very shy and quite unused to being handled by women) didn't care what she did for them, nor mind at what disadvantage she so quietly met them at their need.

Sister Magnet was shy too; use had never hardened her to the care of men, but their pain drew out of her an endless reassurance.

Other sisters cared for their cases and often gave them a selfless and absorbed attention; but to Sister Magnet they weren't cases: they were her spiritual children. The men knew the difference, and leaned on it.

When they failed as cases, and the interest of other nurses lapsed (or their fears, perhaps, caused their attention to falter before the hopelessness of dying human beings), Nelly stepped in and took them over.

It isn't any use being clever with Death, but Nelly did not mind being transcended. She loved best what had gone beyond her powers.

She waited by the dying, and with them through the last slow hours. When the house surgeon had said, 'Unconscious, of course—sinking fast', it was her signal.

Deep in her quiet heart she never believed in the extinction of consciousness before the extinction of life.

It seemed to her that the laboured, difficult breath, the final struggle of relinquishment, needed her just as much as any triumphant return. She took life to the dying, held life over them to the last. Her eyes, soft and filled with eagerness, gazed deep into their fading eyes.

She never said anything about religion to them, she couldn't have said anything; but she held God out to them in her heart.

The life that stood by them wasn't only human; it reached out to them, and encircled them, up those steep and final steps; it fumbled with them at the door, and then, as the door swung open, it stood humbly back, content to watch them pass into the Ultimate Safety.

'They've telephoned through,' the matron said to Nelly one morning, 'six new stretcher cases this afternoon; there's a

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

complicated fractured femur I shall hand over to you; he's certain to be pretty bad, especially if he's had to lie out. You had better prepare him for the theatre the moment he gets in.'

It was four o'clock on a dull March day when the ambulance stopped at the door.

Sister Magnet was used to bad cases, but this boy they brought in to her was one of the most desperate she had ever seen.

He had been lying out forty-eight hours before the stretcher-bearers found him, and he was tortured with gas—his yellow-brown face was hardly human; his piteous eyes fixed themselves on her like a dog that has been run over. She patted him gently on the shoulder. 'There, there, my boy,' she said, in her soft motherly voice, 'there, there!' The boy tried to smile; he was an unconquerably brave boy or he wouldn't have gone on fighting the pain which had swallowed him up, but he couldn't get through his smile.

His breath came in short, moaning gasps. Sister Magnet wasted no time in getting him ready; she saw there was not much time to waste.

He had been bundled across the Channel after a cursory dressing during the great retreat when there was no time to attend to the severest cases.

They got him under chloroform as quickly as they could. Sister Magnet held his hand till he was off. The last thing he knew was the firm, reassuring pressure of her fingers before a blackness which was bliss rushed down on him and drove his tortured consciousness away.

The best surgeon in London spent two hours' marvellous work over his shattered thigh, knitting it together with silver, sorting and manipulating his tissues as if he were playing with a picture puzzle and bringing it all to a masterly result.

'Of course, he probably won't live through it,' he said regretfully as he gave his last artistic touches. 'Sepsis'll see to that—too big a wound.'

Sister Magnet, respectfully handing him a towel, differed sharply from him in her heart. Something stronger even than sepsis was going to see to that boy.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

The first thing that Duncan McAllister felt when he came round miraculously to cleanliness and light—almost to ease—was the same gentle hand across his wrist, the same kind, wise eyes fixed on his, so that he knew that everything was going to be all right before her lips had framed the staggering announcement.

The pain, severe and awful, was quite bearable now because he could locate it; he was no longer drowned in it. Pain was a part of him, he wasn't any more simply an offshoot of pain; and she would keep him in that superb security.

She told him instantly that she would.

'You'll be all right now,' she said; 'by and by I'm going to give you some morphia, but I'd like you to wait for it a little if you can—it'll be better for you afterwards.'

Duncan McAllister said he would wait quite well if she wouldn't go away.

He felt that his only security lay in that white, immaculate figure, whose touch was ease, and in whose eyes lay an enormous reservoir of power.

Sister Magnet knew that this smiling boy was different from any of her other patients (he could get through his smile now, and it was a singularly sweet one); it wasn't only that he was braver: he was more definitely hers.

His restless eyes sought her and followed her every movement about the ward. She had to leave him for a few minutes, but her heart never left him. When she came back, she saw that his whole being had waited for her. She bent over him, and he whispered confidentially, 'Did they take it off?'

Sister Magnet shook her head. 'Oh, dear, no!' she said. 'Most certainly not. We're going to save it.'

'Sure?' the boy repeated.

'Quite sure,' said Sister Magnet, with an imperturbable serenity she was very far from feeling. 'I don't want you to talk,' she added.

The boy's eyes smiled again, wavered, and shut. She felt the leap of the rising fever in his pulse.

He was in for a bad night.

Morphia would dull the appalling pain, but it wouldn't help

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

him. Nothing would help him but his youth and his confidence in her. She stayed by him, hour after hour; her mind felt singularly lucid and unhurried, like some inspired general in a desperate battle.

She had never felt her own strength so exciting before. It flowed out against the boy's danger, dauntlessly and without effort.

He was awake again now, dragged back into the being of pain; but he was not quite drowned in it. From time to time he would meet her eyes and feel conscious that she was still keeping him up—his head had not sunk beneath the deep, submerging sea.

At the last possible moment she gave him up reluctantly into the hands of the night sister.

When she came on again in the early morning, she found him much worse.

He knew her at once, and gasped out, 'Sister, don't leave me!'

'I shall stay with you all day,' she said firmly.

Half a lifetime had been sucked into the boy's interminable night, but he felt there was hope for him now. That unhurried tranquillity of hers again upheld him. He felt as if wings were over him, soft, strong wings, shielding him from all attack.

Sister Magnet did an unprecedented thing: she asked for help in the ward. She explained to the matron that if they wanted this case to pull through he must have a special, and that she must be his special. The matron had never received a suggestion from Sister Magnet before. Docility and prompt obedience were her undeviating record. It was on the tip of the matron's tongue to say, 'He must take his chance with the rest', when Sister Magnet surprisingly forestalled her. She literally took her by the arm and drew her to the side of Duncan McAllister's bed.

Duncan opened his misty eyes. There seemed a thousand frightful clouds rushing across the sky—blotting out the mercy of the light.

'Sister! Sister!' he cried urgently. 'Are you there?'

'Yes,' said Sister Magnet, 'and nothing else is here.'

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

The clouds ceased their erratic rushes, the bedclothes, orderly and cool where his burning body did not touch them, weren't the bottom of a trench after all. He tried to smile again. 'Of course, if you say so——' he muttered.

'Well,' the matron said, consideringly, 'I will see what I can do.' And as matrons can do anything, Nurse Magnet knew that her first point was gained.

She adjusted the screen and settled into the battle. At night she left him for a few hours, with strict injunctions to the night sister to wake her if there was any change. But she was never long away from him. His urgent eyes held her as nothing in her life had ever held her before. It was motherhood at last.

This boy was her child; she was protecting him with her very breath, carrying him beneath her heart. There was no moment of her waking or sleeping life that was not at his service, holding up his flickering soul.

The leg had to go, but he was too ill to know it, and still the temperature stood at 105°, and still his life hung on her hands; and she saw the hours, clear and unmoving like crystal waters, between her and the distant land.

His people came down from the North. She had not remembered that he would have people. There had been a miscarriage of telegrams, and forty-eight hours' delay; but they came at last—a tall, grey-haired old general, and a very thin and eager woman, who put her hand up to her mouth and smiled at Nurse Magnet with Duncan's very smile.

Sister Magnet considered them reflectively; she thought he was too ill for parents, even such parents as these.

'He's very, very weak,' she explained gently, 'and confused with the fever; you know. Don't stay for more than a moment or two, because he's in such pain, and pain makes people nervous at seeing relatives.'

She didn't tell them to be controlled or quiet, because she saw they could never be anything else. They moved noiselessly round the screen and looked at Duncan. He lifted his harried eyes, driven by the pursuit of poison, and knew them.

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

Nurse Magnet drew back a little, but his sharp whisper, 'Sister, Sister!' brought her to his side. 'Send them away,' he muttered thickly.

His eyes rested on them with the dreadful, accusing gravity of pain. He did not smile at them. They seemed to take the air he breathed. Their tenderness shook him, even their self-control threatened his own.

He was bearing all he could—he couldn't bear their muffled pain as well.

'Don't—let—Pussy—come!' he gasped with breathless pauses between his words.

'Oh—not Pussy, my darling?' exclaimed his mother.

'Not Pussy,' he repeated very gravely, and shut his eyes.

His father could stand no more, and hurried out of the ward. But his mother still stood there looking down at him, as if she could not believe in this separation of his wounded spirit from her heart.

Nurse Magnet laid her hand very gently on Mrs. McAllister's and drew her away.

'He's not himself,' she said reassuringly; 'you see, madam, he's not himself.'

But beneath her low-toned sympathy a sharp joy ran—the self that was not himself was hers.

When they had gone, Duncan said to her:

'Keep them away! Don't let them come again—they interrupt me. I only want you.'

Nurse Magnet did not wish to be interrupted either. She had two enemies on whom all her attention was fixed—poison and fever.

She worked unceasingly, and with every ounce of her skill and force, against them both. She never sat down except to eat. She prayed and worked on her feet all day long.

She saw expedients when no-one else saw them and devised alleviations.

She demanded—she did not suggest—remedies from the house surgeon, and the house surgeon, who had never been known to accept the mildest hint from the matron herself, humbly seconded her.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

He explained afterwards that nurses ought always to be purely subordinate, but that there is just one occasion in a blue moon, when they get a kind of possession, if at least they have (as probably one in a thousand has) the real nursing instinct, and when this takes them they know everything, even the secrets of the blood, and had better be allowed to go their own way.

Nurse Magnet had never acted on her own initiative in her life before; she did not realize that she was acting on it now. She only knew that she saw what must be done, and did it, and that nothing, not even authority, appeared in the light of an obstacle.

She meant to save Duncan McAllister's life, and after three weeks' incessant touch and go, she saved it.

She saw suddenly, after an awful, unforgettable night, his temperature had moved, not in the racing zigzag she was accustomed to, but slowly, with a perfectly new steadiness, point by point, downwards.

His eyes were different: they no longer looked submerged. He slept naturally and lightly, without the weight of stupor.

Nurse Magnet sat down opposite the bed and slept too. She did not pray, but her sleep was prayer: it was a lifting-up of her tired heart in gratitude and repose.

When she awoke, he was still sleeping. There was no sound in the room, the stillness of dawn had covered all the restless noises of the night.

Everyone slept; the night sister in the passage outside was making herself an early cup of tea.

Duncan opened his eyes and met Nelly's. He asked for something to drink—usually he never asked for anything, he only looked at her; but in his eyes now there was the birth of a separate consciousness.

She gave him some hot milk without answering him, but her hand shook as she prepared it.

After he had taken it he said:

'Will my people come today, Sister?'

'They come every day,' said Sister Magnet, 'but you haven't felt up to talking to them, so they just take a look at you and go away.'

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

'Today I feel different,' said Duncan, with his charming, tentative smile. 'Thanks to you, you know, Sister! Aren't you awfully tired of me?'

Sister Magnet shook her head.

'I'm never tired,' she said slowly, 'of people who need me.'

He said reassuringly that he needed her all right, and went to sleep again.

That morning a box of roses came for him. Sister Magnet had never seen such roses: their petals were a dark velvety red, and they had a delicate, pungent scent.

There was a note with them. The boy read it and flushed, and laid it down close by him, as if, although he had read it, he had not finished with it.

Sister Magnet loved flowers almost too much. She thought it was nearly sacrilegious to love a created thing with such intensity. Fortunately there was no doubt God had created flowers.

She put the roses with exquisite care into a high vase and placed them where Duncan could see them without moving his eyes.

She went down to breakfast, and when she came up again the sister who had been taking her place said: 'Your boy is better today. Why, I actually heard him give Joseph a telephone message. You've got him round the corner at last.'

'Yes,' said Sister Magnet thoughtfully, 'I think I have got him round the corner.'

It was a wonderful morning for Sister Magnet. The house surgeon said to her in the hearing of the other sisters: 'Well, Sister Magnet, you've done the finest bit of surgical nursing I've ever seen in my life. Frankly, I didn't give that boy one chance in a thousand, and, what's more, I don't believe he had it. You made his chance.'

The consultant surgeon sent for her to the matron's room and made her a set speech of congratulation even more formidable, and had no idea at all that he was crowning this extremely quiet and deserving person with thorns.

Duncan saw his father and mother alone that afternoon. They stayed a long time, and when they came out their faces were transfigured; and then Duncan had another visitor.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Nurse Magnet met her in the passage outside the ward. She was twenty, perhaps, and her hair was an extraordinarily light gold, like the halo of saints in pictures, her eyes the most vivid, laughing blue, and her cheeks had the colour of spring blossoms.

She moved down the long, narrow passage with the flash of a sunbeam.

She stopped before Nurse Magnet with an easy, gracious smile—the smile of a young creature who has never known any power in unkindness.

‘Are you,’ she said, ‘by any chance Mr. McAllister’s nurse?’

‘Yes,’ said Sister Magnet.

‘I’m so glad,’ said the Vision sweetly, ‘because I can thank you. They say you’ve been so perfectly splendid—and he’s getting better?’

‘Yes, he’s getting better,’ said Sister Magnet.

‘And I’m—well, you see’—the Vision bit a lip that was made for laughter—‘I’m specially interested in that, because I’m——’

‘Oh, I know who you are,’ interrupted Sister Magnet. ‘You’re Pussy.’

Katherine Lonsdale’s very blue eyes turned a little frosty. ‘Pussy’ was his pet name for her, but she saw in a flash that the woman in front of her had not meant to be familiar; she was a quiet, kind old thing—‘a perfectly hideous old thing’, the Vision thought her, but not the tiresome sort who gets familiar.

‘I am Katherine Lonsdale,’ she said, ‘and I expect he may have called me Pussy. We’re engaged, you see. Did he—did he talk much about me when he was delirious?’

‘I can’t say that he did,’ said Nurse Magnet consideringly. ‘It was the trenches, you see, he talked of—and his men—they’re like that mostly. It’s what they’ve felt responsible for. But he said your name once; and I remembered it.’

‘You’ll find him in the corner on the right.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ said the Vision.

Sister Magnet stood quite still in the empty passage. Most mothers have to face this moment. Then she said to something that was rebellious in her heart, ‘But it’s natural for young things to love each other’, and turned away from Nature to that other Service, which was to hold her all her days. Her

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

bones ached, and her eyes burned and smarted from sleeplessness, but she held her head as if she were not tired.

She went downstairs to the matron's office.

'If you please, Matron,' she said, with her usual embarrassed docility, 'I don't think number seven wants a special any more. Shall I take back the ward?'

BROTHER LEO

It was a sunny morning, and I was on my way to Torcello. Venice lay behind us a dazzling line, with towers of gold against the blue lagoon. All at once a breeze sprang up from the sea; the small, feathery islands seemed to shake and quiver, and, like leaves driven before a gale, those flocks of coloured butterflies, the fishing-boats, ran in before the storm. Far away to our left stood the ancient tower of Altinum, with the island of Burano a bright pink beneath the towering clouds. To our right, and much nearer, was a small cypress-covered islet. One large umbrella-pine hung close to the sea, and behind it rose the tower of the convent church. The two gondoliers consulted together in hoarse cries and decided to make for it.

'It is San Francesco del Deserto,' the elder explained to me. 'It belongs to the little brown brothers, who take no money and are very kind. One would hardly believe these ones had any religion, they are such a simple people, and they live on fish and the vegetables they grow in their garden.'

We fought the crooked little waves in silence after that; only the high prow rebelled openly against its sudden twistings and turnings. The arrow-shaped gondola is not a structure made for the rough jostling of waves, and the gondoliers had to put forth all their strength and skill to reach the tiny haven under the convent wall. As we did so, the black bars of cloud rushed down upon us in a perfect deluge of rain, and we ran speechless and half-drowned across the tossed field of grass and forget-me-nots to the convent door. A shivering beggar sprang up from nowhere and insisted on ringing the bell for us.

The door opened, and I saw before me a young brown brother with the merriest eyes I have ever seen. They were unshadowed, like a child's, dancing and eager, and yet there was a strange

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

gentleness and patience about him, as if there was no hurry even about his eagerness.

He was very poorly dressed and looked thin. I think he was charmed to see us, though a little shy, like a hospitable country hostess anxious to give pleasure, but afraid that she has not much to offer citizens of a larger world.

'What a tempest!' he exclaimed. 'You have come at a good hour. Enter, enter, Signore! And your men, will they not come in?'

We found ourselves in a very small rose-red cloister; in the middle of it was an old well under the open sky, but above us was a sheltering roof spanned by slender arches. The young monk hesitated for a moment, smiling from me to the two gondoliers. I think it occurred to him that we should like different entertainment, for he said at last:

'Your men would perhaps like to sit in the porter's lodge for a while? Our Brother Lorenzo is there; he is our chief fisherman, with a great knowledge of the lagoons; and he could light a fire for you to dry yourselves by—Signori. And you, if I mistake not, are English, are you not, Signore? It is probable that you would like to see our chapel. It is not much. We are very proud of it, but that, you know, is because it was founded by our blessed father, Saint Francis. He believed in poverty, and we also believe in it, but it does not give much for people to see. That is a misfortune, to come all this way and to see nothing.' Brother Leo looked at me a little wistfully. I think he feared that I should be disappointed. Then he passed before me with swift, eager feet toward the little chapel.

It was a very little chapel and quite bare; behind the altar some monks were chanting an office. It was clean, and there were no pictures or images; but, as I knelt there, I felt as if the little island in its desert of waters, had indeed secreted some vast treasure, and as if the chapel, empty as it had seemed at first, was full of invisible possessions. As for Brother Leo, he had stood beside me nervously for a moment; but on seeing that I was prepared to kneel, he started, like a bird set free, toward the altar steps, where his lithe young impetuosity sank into sudden peace. He knelt there so still, so rapt, so encased in his

listening silence, that he might have been part of the stone pavement. Yet his earthly senses were alive, for the moment I rose he was at my side again, as patient and courteous as ever, though I felt as if his inner ear were listening still to some unheard melody.

We stood again in the pink cloister. 'There is little to see,' he repeated. 'We are *poverelli*; it has been like this for seven hundred years.' He smiled as if that age-long, simple service of poverty were a light matter, an excuse, perhaps, in the eyes of the citizen of a larger world for their having nothing to show. But the citizen, as he looked at Brother Leo, had a sudden doubt as to the size of the world outside. Was it as large, half as large, even, as the eager young heart beside him which had chosen poverty as a bride?

The rain fell monotonously against the stones of the tiny cloister.

'What a tempest!' said Brother Leo, smiling contentedly at the sky. 'You must come in and see our Father. I sent word by the porter of your arrival, and I am sure he will receive you; that will be a pleasure for him, for he is of the great world, too. A very learned man, our Father; he knows the French and the English tongue. Once he went to Rome; also he has been several times to Venice. He has been a great traveller.'

'And you,' I asked—'have you also travelled?'

Brother Leo shook his head.

'I have sometimes looked at Venice,' he said, 'across the water, and once I went to Burano with the marketing brother; otherwise, no, I have not travelled. But being a guest-brother, you see, I meet often with those who have, like your Excellency, for instance, and that is a great education.'

We reached the door of the monastery, and I felt sorry when another brother opened to us, and Brother Leo, with the most cordial of farewell smiles, turned back across the cloister to the chapel door.

'Even if he does not hurry, he will still find prayer there,' said a quiet voice beside me.

I turned to look at the speaker. He was a tall old man with white hair and eyes like small blue flowers, very bright and

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

innocent, with the same look of almost superb contentment in them that I had seen in Brother Leo's eyes.

'But what will you have?' he added, with a twinkle. 'The young are always afraid of losing time; it is, perhaps, because they have so much. But enter, Signore! If you will be so kind as to excuse the refectory, it will give me much pleasure to bring you a little refreshment. You will pardon that we have not much to offer?'

The father—for I found out afterwards that he was the superior himself—brought me bread and wine, made in the convent, and waited on me with his own hands. Then he sat down on a narrow bench opposite to watch me smoke. I offered him one of my cigarettes, but he shook his head, smiling.

'I used to smoke once,' he said. 'I was very particular about my tobacco. I think it was similar to yours—at least the aroma, which I enjoy very much, reminds me of it. It is curious, is it not, the pleasure we derive from remembering what we once had? But perhaps it is not altogether a pleasure unless one is glad that one has not got it now. Here one is free from things. I sometimes fear one may be a little indulgent about one's liberty. Space, solitude, and love—it is all very intoxicating.'

There was nothing in the refectory except the two narrow benches on which we sat, and a long trestle-board which formed the table; the walls were white-washed and bare, the floor was stone. I found out later that the brothers ate and drank nothing except bread and wine and their own vegetables in season, a little macaroni sometimes in winter, and in summer figs out of their own garden. They slept on bare boards, with one thin blanket winter and summer alike. The fish they caught they sold at Burano or gave to the poor. There was no doubt that they enjoyed very great freedom from 'things'.

It was a strange experience to meet a man who could not understand why it was important to save time by using air-planes or the wireless-telegraphy system; but despite the fact that the father seemed very little impressed by our modern urgencies, I never have met a more intelligent listener or one who seized more quickly on all that was essential in an explanation.

BROTHER LEO

'You must not think we do nothing at all, we lazy ones who follow old paths,' he said, in answer to one of my questions. 'There are only eight of us brothers, and there is the garden, fishing, cleaning, and praying. We are sent for, too, from Burano to go and talk a little with the people there, or from some island on the lagoons which perhaps no priest can reach in the winter. It is easy for us, with our little boat and no cares.'

'But Brother Leo told me he had been to Burano only once,' I said. 'That seems strange when you are so near.'

'Yes, he went only once,' said the father, and for a moment or two he was silent, and I found his blue eyes on mine, as if he were weighing me.

'Brother Leo,' said the superior at last, 'is our youngest. He is very young, younger perhaps than his years; but we have brought him up altogether, you see. His parents died of cholera within a few days of each other. As there were no relatives, we took him, and when he was seventeen he decided to join our order. He has always been happy with us, but one cannot say that he has seen much of the world.' He paused again, and once more I felt his blue eyes searching mine. 'Who knows?' he said finally. 'Perhaps you were sent here to help me. I have prayed for two years on the subject, and that seems very likely. The storm is increasing, and you will not be able to return until tomorrow. This evening, if you will allow me, we will speak more on this matter. Meanwhile, I will show you our spare room. Brother Lorenzo will see that you are made as comfortable as we can manage. It is a great privilege for us to have this opportunity; believe me, we are not ungrateful.'

It would have been of no use to try to explain to him that it was for us to feel gratitude. It was apparent that none of the brothers had ever learned that important lesson of the worldly respectable—that duty is what other people ought to do. They were so busy thinking of their own obligations as to overlook entirely the obligations of others. It was not that they did not think of others. I think they thought only of one another, but they thought without a shadow of judgement, with that bright, spontaneous love of little children, too interested to point a moral. Indeed, they seemed to me very like a family of happy

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

children listening to a fairy-story and knowing that the tale is true.

After supper the superior took me to his office. The rain had ceased, but the wind howled and shrieked across the lagoons, and I could hear the waves breaking heavily against the island. There was a candle on the desk, and the tiny, shadowy cell looked like a picture by Rembrandt.

'The rain has ceased now,' the father said quietly, 'and tomorrow the waves will have gone down, and you, Signore, will have left us. It is in your power to do us all a great favour. I have thought much whether I should ask it of you, and even now I hesitate; but Scripture nowhere tells us that the kingdom of heaven was taken by precaution, nor do I imagine that in this world things come oftenest to those who refrain from asking.

'All of us,' he continued, 'have come here after seeing something of the outside world; some of us even had great possessions. Leo alone knows nothing of it, and has possessed nothing, nor did he ever wish to; he has been willing that nothing should be his own, not a flower in the garden, not anything but his prayers, and even these I think he has oftenest shared. But the visit to Burano put an idea in his head. It is, perhaps you know, a factory town where they make lace, and the people live there with good wages, many of them, but also much poverty. There is a poverty which is a grace, but there is also a poverty which is a great misery, and this Leo had never seen before. He did not know that poverty could be a pain. It filled him with a great horror, and in his heart there was a certain rebellion. It seemed to him that in a world with so much money no-one should suffer for the lack of it.

'It was useless for me to point out to him that in a world where there is so much health God has permitted sickness; where there is so much beauty, ugliness; where there is so much holiness, sin. It is not that there is any lack in the gifts of God; all are there, and in abundance, but He has left their distribution to the soul of man. It is easy for me to believe this. I have known what money can buy and what it cannot buy; but Brother Leo, who never has owned a penny, how should he know anything of the ways of pennies?

BROTHER LEO

'I saw that he could not be contented with my answer; and then this other idea came to him—the idea that is, I think, the blessed hope of youth: that this thing being wrong, he, Leo, must protest against it, must resist it! Surely, if money can do wonders, we who set ourselves to work the will of God should have more control of this wonder-working power? He fretted against his rule. He did not permit himself to believe that our blessed father, Saint Francis, was wrong, but it was a hardship for him to refuse alms from our kindly visitors. He thought the beggars' rags would be made whole by gold; he wanted to give them more than bread, he wanted, *poverino!* to buy happiness for the whole world.'

The father paused, and his dark, thought-lined face lighted up with a sudden, beautiful smile till every feature seemed as young as his eyes.

'I do not think the human being has ever lived who has not thought that he ought to have happiness,' he said. 'We begin at once to get ready for heaven; but heaven is a long way off. We make haste slowly. It takes us all our lives, and perhaps purgatory, to get to the bottom of our own hearts. That is the last place in which we look for heaven, but I think it is the first in which we shall find it.'

'But it seems to me extraordinary that, if Brother Leo has this thing so much on his mind, he should look so happy,' I exclaimed. 'That is the first thing I noticed about him.'

'Yes, it is not for himself that he is searching,' said the superior. 'If it were, I should not wish him to go out into the world, because I should not expect him to find anything there. His heart is utterly at rest; but though he is personally happy, this thing troubles him. His prayers are eating into his soul like flame, and in time this fire of pity and sorrow will become a serious menace to his peace. Besides, I see in Leo a great power of sympathy and understanding. He has in him the gift of ruling other souls. He is very young to rule his own soul, and yet he rules it. When I die, it is probable that he will be called to take my place, and for that it is necessary he should have seen clearly that our rule is right. At present he accepts

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

it in obedience, but he must have more than obedience in order to teach it to others; he must have a personal light.

'This, then, is the favour I have to ask of you, Signore. I should like to have you take Brother Leo to Venice tomorrow, and, if you have the time at your disposal, I should like you to show him the towers, the churches, the palaces, and the poor who are still so poor. I wish him to see how people spend money, both the good and the bad. I wish him to see the world. Perhaps then it will come to him—as it came to me—that money is neither a curse nor a blessing in itself, but only one of God's mysteries, like the dust in a sunbeam.'

'I will take him very gladly; but will one day be enough?' I answered.

The superior arose and smiled again.

'Ah, we slow worms of earth,' he said, 'are quick about some things! You have learned to save time by flying-machines; we, too, have certain methods of flight. Brother Leo learns all his lessons that way. I hardly see him start before he arrives. You must not think I am so myself. No, no. I am an old man who has lived a long life learning nothing, but I have seen Leo grow like a flower in a tropic night. I thank you, my friend, for this great favour. I think God will reward you.'

Brother Lorenzo took me to my bedroom; he was a talkative old man, very anxious for my comfort. He told me that there was an office in the chapel at two o'clock, and one at five to begin the day, but he hoped that I should sleep through them.

'They are all very well for us,' he explained, 'but for a stranger, what cold, what disturbance, and what a difficulty to arrange the right thoughts in the head during chapel! Even for me it is a great temptation. I find my mind running on coffee in the morning, a thing we have only on great feast-days. I may say that I have fought this thought for seven years, but though a small devil, perhaps, it is a very strong one. Now, if you should hear our bell in the night, as a favour pray that I may not think about coffee. Such an imperfection! I say to myself, the sin of Esau! But he, you know, had some excuse; he had been hunting. Now, I ask you—one has not much chance of that on this little island; one has only one's sins to hunt, and, alas! they don't

run away as fast as one could wish! I am afraid they are tame, these ones. May your Excellency sleep like the blessed saints, only a trifle longer!

I did sleep a trifle longer; indeed, I was quite unable to assist Brother Lorenzo to resist his coffee devil during chapel-time. I did not wake till my tiny cell was flooded with sunshine and full of the sound of Saint Francis' birds. Through my window I could see the fishing-boats pass by. First came one with a pair of lemon-yellow sails, like floating primroses; then a boat as scarlet as a dancing flame, and half a dozen others painted, some with jokes and some with incidents in the lives of patron saints, all gliding out over the blue lagoon to meet the golden day.

I rose, and from my window I saw Brother Leo in the garden. He was standing under Saint Francis' tree—the old gnarled umbrella-pine which hung over the convent-wall above the water by the island's edge. His back was toward me, and he was looking out over the blue stretch of lagoon into the distance, where Venice lay like a moving cloud at the horizon's edge; but a mist hid her from his eyes, and while I watched him he turned back to the garden-bed and began pulling out weeds. The gondoliers were already at the tiny pier when I came out.

'*Per Bacco, Signore!*' the elder explained. 'Let us hasten back to Venice and make up for the Lent we have had here. The brothers gave us all they had, the holy ones—a little wine, a little bread, cheese that couldn't fatten one's grandmother, and no macaroni—not so much as would go round a baby's tongue! For my part, I shall wait till I get to heaven to fast, and pay some attention to my stomach while I have one.' And he spat on his hands and looked toward Venice.

'And not an image in the chapel!' agreed the younger man. 'Why, there is nothing to pray to, but the Signore Dio Himself! *Veramente*, Signore, you are a witness that I speak nothing but the truth.'

The father superior and Leo appeared at this moment down the path between the cypresses. The father gave me thanks and spoke in a friendly way to the gondoliers, who for their part expressed a very pretty gratitude in their broad Venetian patois,

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

one of them saying that the hospitality of the monks had been like paradise itself, and the other hasting to agree with him.

The two monks did not speak to each other, but as the gondolier turned the high prow toward Venice, a long look passed between them—such a look as a father and son might exchange if the son were going out to war, while his father, remembering old campaigns, was yet bound to stay at home.

It was a glorious day in early June; the last traces of the storm had vanished from the serene, still waters; a vague curtain of heat and mist hung and shimmered between ourselves and Venice; far away lay the little islands in the lagoon, growing out of the water like strange sea-flowers. Behind us stood San Francesco del Deserto, with long reflections of its one pink tower and arrow-straight cypresses, soft under the blue water.

The father superior walked slowly back to the convent, his brown-clad figure a shining shadow between the two black rows of cypresses. Brother Leo waited till he had disappeared, then he turned his eager eyes toward Venice.

As we approached the city the milky sea of mist retreated, and her towers sprang up to greet us. I saw a look in Brother Leo's eyes that was not fear or wholly pleasure; yet there was in it a certain awe and a strange, tentative joy, as if something in him stretched out to greet the world. He muttered half to himself:

'What a great world, and how many children *il Signore Dio* has!'

When we reached the piazzetta, and he looked up at the amazing splendour of the ducal palace, that building of soft yellow, with its pointed arches and double loggias of white marble, he spread out both his hands in an ecstasy.

'But what a miracle!' he cried. 'What a joy to God and to His angels! How I wish my brothers could see this! Do you not imagine that some good man was taken to paradise to see this great building and brought back here to copy it?'

'*Chi lo sa?*' I replied guardedly, and we landed by the column of the Lion of Saint Mark's. That noble beast, astride his pedestal, with wings outstretched, delighted the young monk, who walked round and round him.

BROTHER LEO

'What a tribute to the saint!' he exclaimed. 'Look, they have his wings, too. Is not that faith?'

'Come,' I said, 'let us go on to Saint Mark's. I think you would like to go there first; it is the right way to begin our pilgrimage.'

The piazza was not very full at that hour of the morning, and its emptiness increased the feeling of space and size. The pigeons wheeled and circled to and fro, a dazzle of soft plumage, and the cluster of golden domes and sparkling minarets glittered in the sunshine like flames. Every image and statue on Saint Mark's wavered in great lines of light like a living pageant set in a sea of gold.

Brother Leo said nothing as he stood in front of the three great doorways that lead into the church. He stood quite still for a while, and then his eyes fell on a beggar beside the pink and cream of the new campanile, and I saw the wistfulness in his eyes suddenly grow as deep as pain.

'Have you money, Signore?' he asked me. That seemed to him the only question. I gave the man something, but I explained to Brother Leo that he was probably not so poor as he looked.

'They live in rags,' I explained, 'because they wish to arouse pity. Many of them need not beg at all.'

'Is it possible?' asked Brother Leo gravely; then he followed me under the brilliant doorways of mosaic which lead into the richer dimness of Saint Mark's.

When he found himself within that great encrusted jewel, he fell on his knees. I think he hardly saw the golden roof, the jewelled walls, and the five lifted domes full of sunshine and old gold, or the dark altars, with their mysterious, rich shimmering. All these seemed to pass away beyond the sense of sight; even I felt somehow as if those great walls of Saint Mark's were not so great as I had fancied. Something greater was kneeling there in an old habit and 'with bare feet, half broken-hearted because a beggar had lied.

I found myself regretting the responsibility laid on my shoulders. Why should I have been compelled to take this strangely innocent, sheltered boy, with his fantastic third-century ideals, out into the shoddy, decorative, unhappy world?

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

I even felt a kind of anger at the simplicity of his soul. I wished he were more like other people; I suppose because he had made me wish for a moment that I was less like them.

'What do you think of Saint Mark's?' I asked him as we stood once more in the hot sunshine outside, with the strutting pigeons at our feet and wheeling over our heads.

Brother Leo did not answer for a moment, then he said:

'I think Saint Mark would feel it a little strange. You see, I do not think he was a great man in the world, and the great in paradise——' He stooped and lifted a pigeon with a broken foot nearer to some corn a passer-by was throwing for the birds. 'I cannot think,' he finished gravely, 'that they care very much for palaces in paradise; I should think everyone had them there or else—nobody.'

I was surprised to see the pigeons that wheeled away at my approach allow the monk to handle them, but they seemed unaware of his touch.

'*Poverino!*' he said to the one with the broken foot. 'Thank God that He has given you wings!'

Brother Leo spoke to every child he met, and they all answered him as if there were a secret freemasonry between them; but the grown-up people he passed with troubled eyes.

'It seems strange to me,' he said at last, 'not to speak to these brothers and sisters of ours, and yet I see all about me that they do not salute one another.'

'They are many, and they are all strangers,' I tried to explain.

'Yes, they are very many,' he said a little sadly. 'I had not known that there were so many people in the world, and I thought that in a Christian country they would not be strangers.'

I took another gondola by the nearest bridge, and we rowed to the Frari. I hardly knew what effect that great church, with its famous Titian, would have upon him. A group of tourists surrounded the picture. I heard a young lady exclaiming:

'My! but I'd like her veil! Ain't she cute, looking round it that way?'

Brother Leo did not pause; he passed as if by instinct toward the chapel on the right which holds the softest, tenderest of

BROTHER LEO

Bellinis. There, before the Madonna with her four saints and two small attendant cherubs, he knelt again, and his eyes filled with tears. I do not think he heard the return of the tourists, who were rather startled at seeing him there. The elder lady remarked that he might have some infectious disease, and the younger that she did not think much of Bellini, anyway.

He knelt for some time, and I had not the heart to disturb him; indeed, I had no wish to, either, for Bellini's Madonna is my favourite picture; and that morning I saw in it more than I had ever seen before. It seemed to me as if that triumphant, mellow glow of the great master was an eternal thing, and as if the saints and their gracious Lady, with the stalwart, standing Child upon her knee, were more real than flesh and blood, and would still be more real when flesh and blood had ceased to be. I never have recaptured the feeling; perhaps there was something infectious about Brother Leo, after all. He made no comment on the Madonna, nor did I expect one, for we do not need to assert that we find the object of our worship beautiful; but I was amused at his calm refusal to look upon the great Titian as a Madonna at all.

'No, no,' he said firmly. 'This one is no doubt some good and gracious lady, but the Madonna! Signore, you jest. Or, if the painter thought so, he was deceived by the Devil. Yes, that is very possible. The father has often told us that artists are exposed to great temptations: their eyes see paradise before their souls have reached it, and that is a great danger.'

I said no more, and we passed out into the street again. I felt ashamed to say that I wanted my luncheon, but I did say so, and it did not seem in the least surprising to Brother Leo; he merely drew out a small wallet and offered me some bread, which he said the father had given him for our needs.

I told him that he must not dream of eating that; he was to come and lunch with me at my hotel. He replied that he would go wherever I liked, but that really he would prefer to eat his bread unless indeed we were so fortunate as to find a beggar who would like it. However, we were not so fortunate, and I was compelled to eat my exceedingly substantial five-course luncheon while my companion sat opposite me and ate his half-

loaf of black bread with what appeared to be appetite and satisfaction.

He asked me a great many questions about what everything in the room was used for and what everything cost, and appeared very much surprised at my answers.

'This, then,' he said, 'is not like all the other houses in Venice? Is it a special house—perhaps for the English only?'

I explained to him that most houses contained tables and chairs; that this, being a hotel, was in some ways even less furnished than a private house, though doubtless it was larger and was arranged with a special eye to foreign requirements.

'But the poor—they do not live like this?' Leo asked. I had to own that the poor did not. 'But the people here are rich?' Leo persisted.

'Well, yes, I suppose so, tolerably well off,' I admitted.

'How miserable they must be!' exclaimed Leo compassionately. 'Are they not allowed to give away their money?'

This seemed hardly the way to approach the question of the rich and the poor, and I do not know that I made it any better by an after-dinner exposition upon capital and labour. I finished, of course, by saying that if the rich gave to the poor today, there would still be rich and poor tomorrow. It did not sound very convincing to me; and it did nothing whatever to convince Brother Leo.

'That is perhaps true,' he said at last. 'One would not wish, however, to give all into unready hands like that poor beggar this morning who knew no better than to pretend in order to get more money. No, that would be the gift of a madman. But could not the rich use their money in trust for the poor, and help and teach them little by little till they learned how to share their labour and their wealth? But you know how ignorant I am who speak to you. It is probable that this is what is already being done even here now in Venice and all over the world. It would not be left to a little one like me to think of it. What an idea for the brothers at home to laugh at!'

'Some people do think these things,' I admitted.

'But do not all?' asked Brother Leo incredulously.

'No, not all,' I confessed.

'*Andiamo!*' said Leo, rising resolutely. 'Let us pray to the Madonna. What a vexation it must be to her and to all the blessed saints to watch the earth! It needs the patience of the Blessed One Himself, to bear it.'

In the Palazzo Giovanelli there is one of the loveliest of Giorgiones. It is called *His Family*, and it represents a beautiful nude woman with her child and her lover. It seemed to me an outrage that this young brother should know nothing of the world, of life. I was determined that he should see this picture. I think I expected Brother Leo to be shocked when he saw it. I know I was surprised that he looked at it—at the serene content of earth, its exquisite ultimate satisfaction—a long time. Then he said, in an awed voice:

'It is so beautiful that it is strange anyone in all the world can doubt the love of God who gave it.'

'Have you ever seen anything more beautiful; do you believe there is anything more beautiful?' I asked rather cruelly.

'Yes,' said Brother Leo very quietly; 'the love of God is more beautiful, only that cannot be painted.'

After that I showed him no more pictures, nor did I try to make him understand life. I had an idea that he understood it already better than I did.

When I took him back to the piazza, it was getting on towards sunset, and we sat at one of the little tables at Florian's, where I drank coffee. We heard the band and watched the slow-moving, good-natured Venetian crowd, and the pigeons winging their perpetual flight.

All the light of the gathered day seemed to fall on the great golden church at the end of the piazza. Brother Leo did not look at it very much; his attention was taken up completely in watching the faces of the crowd, and as he watched them I thought to read in his face what he had learned in that one day in Venice—whether my mission had been a success or a failure; but, though I looked long at that simple and child-like face, I learned nothing.

What are so mysterious as the eyes of a child?

But I was not destined to part from Brother Leo wholly in ignorance. It was as if, in his open kindliness of nature, he would

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

not leave me with any unspoken puzzle between us. I had been his friend, and he told me, because it was the way things seemed to him, that I had been his teacher.

We stood on the piazzetta. I had hired a gondola with two men to row him back; the water was like beaten gold, and the horizon the softest shade of pink.

'This day I shall remember all my life,' he said, 'and you in my prayers with all the world—always, always! Only I should like to tell you that that little idea of mine, which the father told me he had spoken to you about, I see now that it is too large for me. I am only a very poor monk. I should think I must be the poorest monk God has in all His family of monks. If He can be patient, surely I can. And it came over me, while we were looking at all those wonderful things, that if money had been the way to save the world, Christ Himself would have been rich. It was stupid of me. I did not remember that when He wanted to feed the multitude, He did not empty the great granaries that were all His, too; He took only five loaves and two small fishes; but they were enough.

'We little ones can pray, and God can change His world. *Speriamo!*' He smiled as he gave me his hand—a smile which seemed to me as beautiful as anything we had seen that day in Venice. Then the high-prowed, black gondola glided swiftly out over the golden waters with the little brown figure seated in the smallest seat. He turned often to wave to me, but I noticed that he sat with his face away from Venice.

He had turned back to San Francesco del Deserto; and I knew as I looked at his face that he carried no single small regret in his eager heart.

THE WILD BIRD

Bertrand may have caught the power to freeze from watching frightened birds; but he improved upon their system. Whereas the bird, if touched, attempts to fly away, Bertrand, if touched, froze harder.

Publicity appalled him. In the presence of strangers or acquaintances, nothing in him ever went off its guard or warmed up.

He loved very rarely, not saying anything about it; and hoping that the object of his affections would not notice it.

Practically his affections were limited to three persons—his mother, a horse, and his groom; and only the horse—out of these three—was quite certain that Bertrand loved him.

Bertrand's mother, who was shy and fastidious herself, loved him helplessly, and showed her love in little secretive ways, which sometimes annoyed him. Sometimes—not to embarrass herself by her own tenderness—she found fault with Bertrand before strangers.

The rest of his relationships were unimportant. Bertrand did not fall in love until he was twenty-three. Even then you could hardly have referred to it as falling. He kept perfectly still and never moved an eyelash.

It took place in a train. Bertrand was travelling abroad, for the first time, and was happier than usual. His mother, who was travelling with him alone, often wished that Bertrand would express this happiness, which she suspected that he felt, but she had to be content with his sometimes putting his head out of the window.

The train puffed venomously through a mountain, with choking intervals for tunnels. After each of these spurts of black-

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

ness, a feathery waterfall would dart down a precipice, under chestnut trees.

Bertrand glanced down through the tops of the trees, and saw the golden patterns the sun made on the russet carpet of the fallen leaves.

He could do this, without his mother knowing that his heart leapt precipices with the plunging waterfalls, and danced on the forest floor, with the sunbeams.

A small gold bee travelled for a time close to the open window; and when it was left behind, Bertrand felt as if part of himself was lingering on its gauzy wings.

Then he looked across the carriage, as if he had received a secret summons, and met a girl's glance. The sky and a sunbeam together might have matched the changing brightness of her eyes.

Bertrand looked away quickly. He missed the next waterfall.

He made up his mind not to look across the carriage again; but without looking at the girl, he went on seeing her face.

Usually Bertrand was disappointed in women's looks. Their hands were too large, or their feet were pinched; or else their noses shone, or looked blue because they were overpowdered.

As for women's lips, he could not think how any man, not a painter of advertisements, could take any pleasure in them.

This girl's nose may have been powdered, but there were no traces of powder to be seen on it; and her unreddened mouth was the colour of a pink shell. The lines of her head and throat pleased Bertrand; and he liked the delicate roundness of her chin.

What she wore had the simple freshness of expensive things. This, too, pleased Bertrand because he liked expensive things to look simple.

'That's a very pretty girl!' his mother said to him, under her breath.

Bertrand's eyebrows rose incredulously, his nostrils drew in, and he looked disgusted.

'Do you think so?' was what he said; and his mother saw that she had made a mistake.

THE WILD BIRD

‘What a funny boy he is,’ she thought to herself, ‘so unaware of beauty! Will he never wake up?’

The girl opened her purse to make sure of her ticket. She wore neat gauntlet gloves and had narrow hands with slim fingers.

Her eyelashes were very long, and a darker shade of chestnut than her hair.

While she was hunting for her ticket, they fluttered against the soft rose colour of her cheeks.

When Bertrand saw that she was occupied, he looked carefully at her and noticed that she had a small golden freckle on her right cheek-bone.

All the rest of his life, whenever he saw a fleck of gold in a flower or dancing on a wave, the fleck of gold would turn into her face.

He knew quite well what her soul was like. It was shy and very brave. She was so sincere that she would think only one thought at a time; and her whole nature would be behind her thought.

She would not be a talker; but sometimes she would surprise you by a wise word. Bertrand felt that she might not be what is known as a ‘clever’ woman, for though her intellect would be well-trained and politely handled, he knew that her rareness came from a deep heart.

She would never fail herself, and therefore never fail any man to whom she gave herself.

She would not be a facile or demonstrative lover. Nor would she ever boast, or draw attention to herself, or shock a sensitive taste.

Bertrand thought she might be kind if it were very necessary to be kind; but not otherwise.

Bertrand himself was easily provoked by gratuitous good-nature. He considered it to be the most trying form which impertinence can take.

This girl, he knew, would never be impertinent. Nor would she suffer it.

He wondered if she could be as angry as he could be, and hide it as well. Bertrand was very seldom angry, but on the rare occasions when a thing mattered enough to reach his heart,

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

he could be so lacerated by rage that he wondered how the offender dared to stay in the same room with him. Murder would have been child's play to him in these moods, and the worst form of Chinese torture a light pastime. But nobody had ever suspected that Bertrand carried about, behind his cold passivity, these grim and burning passions.

He had always had too much respect for his hate to allow it to stare out like a thing in a shop window, and now that it came to love, he felt that there was no place safe enough to bury this strange treasure in.

Once the girl had succeeded in finding her ticket, Bertrand turned his eyes on the scenery with scrupulous unconcern and looked as if he was unaware of her existence.

The ticket collector came in.

He must have known how to shut a train door without banging it, since half his life was spent in shutting doors. But no doubt to an Italian ticket collector, these sharp concussions were one of the chief pleasures of his working day. He was the kind of man whom Bertrand instinctively hated. Bertrand resented having to show him his mother's ticket and his own; and he shrank with horror at the bare thought of the girl having to show such a man hers.

Bertrand had never learned how to do anything which concerned other human beings mechanically. Under the icy ease of his manner his heart and his brain united in revolt against chance contacts. The things that other men do cheerfully and automatically for themselves and for their women-kind took the life out of Bertrand and jarred his inner sense of personal security.

But now, as he resigned his ticket to the conductor, he knew suddenly that he wanted to show the girl's ticket for her, to spare her the painful moment of contact with a common man. It was not that Bertrand set himself up as being finer than his neighbours, but he suffered from that selfless arrogance of the very shy, who dread being measured by their neighbour's judgement because they have already measured themselves by a far severer standard of their own; and do not wish the question of their possible values to become a public one.

THE WILD BIRD

Bertrand knew instinctively that the girl opposite him shared his dislike of publicity.

She had been fingering her ticket nervously for some time. The colour in her cheeks had changed from that of a pale Malmaison carnation to the deepest rose. The hand which held the ticket trembled. She lifted her eyelashes, and for a long moment her eyes met Bertrand's. He thought they said: 'Oh, isn't it horrible to have to give my ticket to this man! Think if it should be the wrong ticket and I should have to explain!'

Bertrand's eyes spoke too. They said in fellow anguish: 'Oh, I know! I know! It is awful! How I wish I could do it for you!'

He never even thought of freezing, but he looked away from her in time to save her from thinking: 'This is a strange man—daring to feel sorry for me!'

And then an awful thing happened. The ticket the girl handed to the conductor was insufficient.

The girl didn't understand Italian. Bertrand saw the ticket collector mercilessly staring at her while he explained at quite unnecessary length that she must pay fourteen lire extra on her ticket, because she had taken one for an express train instead of for the most express of all possible express trains.

So if she would have the kindness to give him fourteen lire more—and he held out his disgusting hand close to her delicate chin—all would yet be well.

The girl blushed deeper and deeper, her lips trembled, and she made a little helpless sound.

Bertrand's whole being leapt to meet her need—leapt behind a wall of ice. If he had only been alone, he could have spoken.

He knew Italian; but his mother was looking at him. He caught her speculative, slightly mocking eyes, and felt their pressure on his very soul.

She would guess that if he spoke to this girl, it would be because he felt more for her than he had ever felt for any other girl.

He couldn't let his mother suspect that suddenly in his inmost heart a new feeling had flowered! He held his breath, for the girl had wonderfully—instinctively—looked toward him.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

His mother leaned forward. 'My dear Bertrand,' she said, 'I don't think that girl over there can speak Italian. She looks quite flustered over that extra ticket!'

Bertrand bowed his head. His hands clenched themselves together.

There was still time to save the girl if he could only force himself to speak. His mother saw his anguish with pitying, sophisticated eyes. 'Poor boy!' she said to herself. 'How painfully shy he still is! I suppose I must do it for him!'

'That young lady does not speak Italian,' Bertrand's mother told the conductor. 'I will explain about her ticket to her.'

And to the girl she said gently, 'He is asking you for an extra fourteen lire. It is really ridiculous that one has to pay these extras on trains. They ought to tell one about it at the ticket-office—but they never do!'

She spoke in her easy, well-bred way, giving the girl time to get over her confusion and to find her fourteen lire.

Bertrand leaned back as stiffly as a stone crusader on his tomb. His mouth set, his eyes looked like the blank eyes of a statue; behind them his heart lay broken and forlorn.

Through his agony he heard the girl saying, in a released and happy voice—as sweet as music, 'Oh, thank you! Thank you so much! It's so stupid of me not to be able to understand Italian! I couldn't think what the conductor meant!'

It was Bertrand's fancy, perhaps, that there was the vaguest hint of disappointment in her relief; as if the wrong Perseus had slain her dragon. At the next station, the girl got out.

His mother said: 'That pretty girl who didn't know Italian has been met by her brother or her father, perhaps. I am glad they had the sense to send someone. She's much too pretty to travel about Italy alone. So nicely dressed too! But really, Bertrand, my dear, you shouldn't be so shy! Don't you think you ought to have explained to the ticket collector for her? The girl must have thought it a little odd—for a man to leave it to his mother to come to her rescue!'

The ice held. His mother could not see, behind it, the ruins of Bertrand's broken heart.

THE WILD BIRD

No-one sitting in the same train would think anything if he looked at him, except perhaps that Bertrand did not care very much for travelling.

No-one would dream that his lonely heart—for the first time—had met another heart which had not frightened him. And that he had let this sudden chance of joy be irretrievably lost.

THE HOME-COMING

Far away, as if she were in another world, Lady Arabella heard the agent's persuasive voice. She had to open her large blue eyes a little wider in order to focus him at all.

It was not, she reminded herself, the fault of this poor, glib little person that he had shown her all the wrong Florentine villas—monstrous show places close to the city itself, always, as he fondly told her, the thing she least wanted—accessible!

She had spent the day wandering over a dozen inconvenient, impressive palaces, dismissing them with a courteous finality.

'I fear you will find the Villa Beata too far out!' the agent murmured anxiously, 'but with a car so powerful as this, distance is not of great account. It is a great Piece! A National Monument of the best period! One sees all Florence from its terraces—but one must admit it is not intimate.' Enrico Oppo sighed expressively; the long trail of his superlatives threatened to dry up. He could not go on pouring out the riches of his commercial imagination to this grim, great lady, who had the face of a Sleeping Fury.

She might be any age—two thousand years would have been nothing! She was as white and fixed as marble; only those strange blue eyes shone out of her face like pale flames. They haunted Enrico, for they were not only sad, they were, behind their sadness, angry. Enrico could sympathize very easily with hot anger, but he trembled at the thought of an anger which had been kept cold, for years. Discouragement smote speech from him.

Lady Arabella gazed out of the window past his head. Olives flew by them, white dust rose round them, a rickety collection of sunburnt and raspberry-daubed villas straggled out of quarried hillsides to the road's edge. Dusty black cypresses

strode across the hills, deepening the sadness of the autumn day.

The car began to climb between high walls, swept through a village street clinging to a hillside, and stopped abruptly at the end of a long narrow lane.

An avenue of cypresses hid the villa.

Enrico Oppo descended from the palatial car with a swing—he still hoped to impress somebody, even to persuade them that he was its owner. But there was nobody to impress. It began to rain. The cypresses dripped. Lady Arabella sat indifferently still. She looked, Enrico thought shiveringly, like a white tombstone between the cypresses. All the better, since she looked like a tombstone, perhaps she would fancy a cemetery!

At last a creature, like a goblin, hobbled slowly down the avenue, toward the gate. The car turned into the solemn space between the cypresses. A massive stone fortress thrust its impressive bulk suddenly upon them.

The goblin fumbled with a huge key. The door swung open. They stood in a courtyard between cliff-like walls. Lady Arabella's eyes wandered to the distant tiled roof half pink, half brown. She paced slowly, but without distaste, into the vast echoing rooms.

The definite firm lines of walls and ceilings, the superb vaultings and just spaces, evoked no comment from her, but into the glassy coldness of her eyes a faint light crept.

She spoke for the first time:

'I should like,' she said, turning to Enrico, 'to have that window opened.'

Enrico was hopeless now, what could be more dispiriting than an empty terrace in the rain—not even a café in sight! He knew this terrace. The low walls that bound it were spotted with large stone dogs.

In front of the villa, pools were cut, by dark hedges of yew and ilex, into a pattern like a Persian garden. The frogs which croaked there always would surely croak more dismally and more unitedly, on a wet evening.

Enrico helped the gardener, sullenly, to fling back the heavy steel shutters. Lady Arabella stepped out upon the terrace. She

THE HOME-COMING

turned her head as she passed Enrico. 'You need not accompany me,' she said drily, 'I should prefer to see the garden alone.'

Enrico was terribly ruffled—and infinitely relieved. He could not forget that he was a fine young man of twenty-six years old; even a great lady of uncertain age should surely have fluttered a little before his admirable youth! But at the same time what a mercy to be reprieved from this unflappable presence, and to be able to express to a compatriot, however gnarled and old, what he, Enrico, thought of English ladies.

Lady Arabella was soon swallowed up in the dim grey light. She wandered across the stone flags of the wide terrace, jewelled here and there with patches of green moss.

She leaned against the parapet and gazed over the olive-covered vineyards, which sloped toward Florence.

The vintage was over. The yellowing leaves hung raggedly between the olives, like forgotten gold. A little village, apricot and brown, fringed the distant line of the hillside it had climbed over.

In the hollow of the plain, the slender towers of the Bargello and the Badia rose together. A little apart from them, too far for colour but carrying through the distance the lightness of its inflexible grace, sprang Giotto's tower, shepherding the heap of grey stones which was Florence.

Lady Arabella looked for a long time over the city.

She stood so still she might have been one of the statues which from time to time broke the line of the balustrade; but her mind was not still. It moved, in picture after picture, over a lifetime, and in each picture was a shadow which she would not look at, but which darkened all the beauty she had ever known.

She moved at last, and paced slowly toward the front of the villa.

The house hung like a cliff over the steep dip of the hillside, with only the waves of the air to beat against it.

The fringed pools shone at her, like welcoming eyes, out of the dusk. At the end of the garden, between it and the bare sky, were openings cut in the high wall of ilex. Lady Arabella stood at one of these green windows and glanced down over a misty

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

sea of olives on the single brightness of the Arno, drifting across the floor of the valley like a silver thread. Slowly she drank in the dim landscape; the low sky; the soft, disintegrated hills, where here and there a villa shone into the dull light with the luminousness of a pearl. They were far enough away—those villas and those distant towers!

She paced between the stiff yew hedges and hovered over the pools where goldfish moved faintly their orange and silver scales. There was a disinterested friendliness in the moss-grown statues which stood in front of the dwarf cypress trees at the pool's edge. They could not speak to her; they could not remind her of anyone. The continuous croaking of the frogs was not a personal affair.

'I think this house will do!' Lady Arabella said softly to herself.

In the following spring Lady Arabella took up her residence in the villa, with sufficient servants to keep up its dignity, and a large, extremely fierce white Abruzzi dog, to reinforce the stone dogs on the terrace.

The bell at the great gates seldom rang. Lady Arabella had no neighbours but the priest and her peasants.

She treated her peasants with scrupulous fairness and secret generosity.

She gave to the village priest—Father Antonio, who came from the North and was reputed to be a saint and a scholar—whatever he asked for his charities.

It was a scandal—many people in the village thought—that he did not ask for more.

Occasionally Lady Arabella invited him to tea. Father Antonio disliked tea, which he drank only for medicinal purposes; but he always accepted Lady Arabella's invitations because he thought it bad for her to have no visitors.

Sometimes they talked about the peasants, and sometimes they talked about the universe; but one subject Father Antonio noticed that they never talked about, and that was Lady Arabella herself.

One day, after five years of this impersonal relationship, Lady Arabella sent Father Antonio one of her usual invitations. She asked him to come to tea on Thursday and was his sincerely.

THE HOME-COMING

There was nothing in this note but what there had always been.

Father Antonio put on his best cassock and looked up an article on English politics, because he thought he might quite well be called upon to discuss a new Prime Minister of that distant island, in which he took no great interest.

It was late spring and the grass of the great terrace was strewn with daisies and forget-me-nots.

The frogs in the iris-fringed pools kept up an incessant, but not disturbing, background of sound.

The heat of the day had softened. Beneath the silver twilight of the olive leaves the young wheat burned green.

Here and there a scarlet poppy beat, like the sound of a drum, its loud note of colour into the fading light.

Lady Arabella did not rise, but she greeted Father Antonio graciously. She was dressed, as usual, in expensive and very simple black.

She talked for a time without emphasis; and pools of silence settled about her stiff, infrequent words.

'It is as if', Father Antonio thought to himself sympathetically, 'the poor thing made an economy of words!'

After she had poured him out his tea, Lady Arabella said: 'We have known each other for a long time now, Father Antonio!'

Father Antonio looked up sharply. The cool and arrogant eyes which met his own bore their usual aloof expression, but one hand which lay upon Lady Arabella's knee moved spasmodically.

'You must sometimes wonder', she went on after a pause, 'why I came here, and, perhaps, why I live so much alone? It is true that I have made my confessions to you. But people's sins are not the same as their stories. I have not hitherto thought it incumbent on me to make any statements to you about my former life. Circumstances, however, have arisen which make me desirous to consult you about a personal matter. I must therefore trouble you—if you have the time to spare—with a little of my personal history.'

'But certainly, Signora Contessa,' Father Antonio replied earnestly, 'my time is yours—and all my attention! After thirty

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

years' ministry among souls, I do not know that I am prepared to agree that people's sins are not the same as their stories—it has sometimes occurred to me to wonder where the difference comes in! But your case is an unusual one. You have told me so briefly about your sins that they have not quite divulged your story.'

Lady Arabella nodded. 'I wish I could be as brief', she said, 'now—but I cannot. Keeping secrets is a more natural process to me than revealing them. What should you suppose mine to be?'

Father Antonio spread out his hands apologetically.

'Naturally,' he murmured, 'one has often wondered why you live here—like a prisoner on your own estate! And so has the village! It was for a time talked of continually. At first they gave you an army of lovers. But after a time, having watched the strictness of your life, they became certain that you were chosen of God—to be a great saint. Yes! that is how they think of you, now, Padrona!

'It is a good thing for us all that you are a Catholic. No *forestiere* is ever so much of a *forestiere* if he is also a child of God!'

'But you have not thought me a great saint!' Lady Arabella said, with a faint twinkle in her frosty blue eyes.

'You have in your confessions told me that you cannot forgive.' Father Antonio explained gently: 'even a very little saint forgives!'

'Ah, but, Father, little saints may have had only little wrongs done them,' Lady Arabella said seriously. 'I do not lay claim to be any kind of saint, but if I were, I should not try to forgive a great wrong that had been done to me. I should look on forgiveness as in itself a wrong! Surely you must admit that there are times when human beings do well to be angry!'

Father Antonio crumbled one of the Padrona's cheerless little cakes against the terrace wall, hoping that the constitution of the lizards might be better able to resist its rocky nature.

'To be angry—yes!' he agreed. 'I think one often has such a right. Cruelty! Falseness! A carelessness which is selfishness! A vanity which is ruthless! All such sins give one such a right.'

THE HOME-COMING

But anger is like milk, it should not be kept too long. It turns sour.'

'In my opinion', Lady Arabella said, with controlled fierceness, 'anger should last as long as the wrong which has caused it. Let the sinner repent and make atonement, before one is able to forgive!'

'It is true', Father Antonio admitted mildly, 'that the sinner cannot take forgiveness until he has repented. But I think, my daughter, that the forgiveness should be there. If you remember, it was while the Prodigal Son was yet a great way off that his father saw him and ran to meet him. The father must, I think, have been on the lookout for that home-coming, and you will notice that he *ran* to meet his son! He could not have known whether the son were sorry or not until after he had clasped him in his arms!'

Lady Arabella frowned impatiently.

'The wrongs the Prodigal Son had done his father were nothing', she said bitterly, 'compared to mine! He had another son.'

Father Antonio bowed his head. There was a long silence. The golden light of evening deepened.

The Arno sparkled far away in the valley like a stream of fire. The olive leaves became more solid, as if they were carved in silver.

The shadows of the cypresses lay dark upon the vivid emerald of the grass.

'I find that one has to look deeply into wrongs', Father Antonio said at last, 'to find what they are made of! One cannot deal with them simply—as if they were a heap of stones dumped upon the wayside. Wrongs are intangible things made up of forces, emotions, hidden conflicts of the will—apparent accidents! In all wrongs there is some innocence. One must lay hold of that, and in all wrongs there is some hidden sharing. We do good by ourselves, but we seldom do wrong alone.'

'Dear Padrona, do not think me impertinent if I ask you to remember that in all anger, however justified, there is a thread of self-defence!'

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Lady Arabella's blue eyes were wide awake now and their coldness gone.

'You cannot say that I was to blame,' she said harshly. 'I gave all I had—love—faith—least of all, money—and I had no wish but theirs! I tell you there was nothing in my heart that I ever kept from either of them, and there was nothing in my heart that they did not betray!

'I came here to escape—to live alone, since that is what they had condemned me to—but they have not even left me—loneliness. I thought this place remote enough, silent enough. I could be quiet here. But even here Memory besieges me. I am not quiet. As for my anger—you are wrong, I am sure, Father, to tell me to part with it! That is the only thing in me which is still alive. If you took my anger from me, I should crumble into dust.'

Father Antonio lifted his head and looked at Lady Arabella. Her face was so white that it seemed to him as if, at any moment, it might become transparent and reveal the violence within.

'It will do you good', he said consideringly, 'to tell me what you feel. These hidden flames eat up the heart. We have, as you say, known each other for a long time. I have never heard you speak of yourself before, but I have sometimes thought it better that you should!'

'Well, I will speak now', Lady Arabella said harshly, 'because I must. It will be the first, and the last time. I have no need to ask of you to keep my confidence—since one gives no confidence to a person of whom one must ask silence.

'You must know that I am rich. My father was a great land-owner, he was also what is known in England as a great personage. My mother was a rich American. She died young, after an unhappy married life, and left the greater part of her immense fortune to me. I was her only child. My father remarried immediately, and there was another daughter born by his second marriage. My father and my stepmother died young, and I was left, at twenty-two, sole guardian of my half-sister. She became my life. My fortune was nothing to me but a background for her. I would have let her walk on my bare heart.'

Lady Arabella paused, her eyes hardened.

THE HOME-COMING

'My relations', she went on, 'thought me too immersed in the child and her interests to think of marriage. I had many suitors, but I had never been in love. To be free and to have *Mélisande* was enough for me. However, I understood that my absorption might be bad for the child, so at length I agreed to send her to France alone, to finish her education.

'My relations were right—for in her absence I fell in love. The man I fell in love with became my husband. He had what in my set was considered no money, but he came of good blood and had fought with great distinction in France. There was no objection to our marriage. He cared nothing for my money. He would have no settlements made upon him.

'I know what can be said for love, and what for happiness, and he who made both for me—took them both away from me! Perhaps you do not know, Father, the strength of happy human love—the roots it sends into the tethered heart? There was no one near enough to me to point out my danger. With my blind eyes I led them on—hastening the catastrophe. They were to me—father and child—no more—and no less.

'At the season's end I sent them into the country together, to escape some philanthropic duties I thought myself bound to fulfil. My husband urged me to give up these functions and go with them. *Mélisande*, when she kissed me good-bye, cried for an instant in my arms. Our love was so intense that her tears did not seem strange to me, I only thought there was the greater need for her to go into the country. I said to myself that she was overwrought and tired; and my husband's protests seemed but the echo of my own heart.'

Lady Arabella's low voice died suddenly. There was no sound but the dull rhythm of the croaking frogs.

'I never saw either of them again,' she went on at last. 'My husband wrote to tell me that they loved each other—fatally—permanently—and that they could no longer—even for my sake—fight against their passion. He begged me to give him his freedom and my forgiveness. I gave him his freedom, but I shall never forgive him. *Mélisande* asked me for nothing at all. So that she does not know that she has everything—even my forgiveness.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

'That is my story, Father. I came here not to forgive—but to forget my wrongs. It seems that I cannot forget them. I came here to find peace—and I have not found it!'

Father Antonio was silent for so long that at last Lady Arabella turned her eyes to his, which rested on the silver plain beneath them.

The sculptured olive leaves no longer hung separate in the golden air; they melted softly into each other, and like a veil of smoke poured down the hillside towards the gleaming towers.

'Yes,' she said impatiently, as if she were answering Father Antonio's unspoken thoughts: 'I see that peace is here. The olive trees are full of it, and the great rooms behind us—in this house which I have chosen, there is space enough for peace! But what is that to me, since in my heart I find no peace at all?'

Father Antonio leaned forward and touched, with a light finger, a crimson-tipped daisy. 'You cannot take the peace', he said gently, 'which belongs to something else. This little flower, for instance, so tightly closed, has willingly accepted night. To-morrow when the sun touches it again it will accept the day. But it cannot share with you the peace of its acceptances. Have you ever asked yourself—what it is that you cannot forgive?'

'How can you ask me such a question?' Lady Arabella demanded. 'Has he not robbed me—not only of his own love—a man has perhaps that right! I could forgive, although I should despise, an inconstant lover! But I cannot forgive the man who took away my child. Do you suppose he can ever make her happy? She has the tenderest heart. We were built into each other. Our pursuits—the very stuff of our minds was of the same texture. She can never look at a sunset and forget me. I can never see the young vines grow—and not remember her!'

'But why should you forget—either of them?' Father Antonio asked gently. 'Go on remembering them—that is your safety! Go on thinking of them—but differently! How cruel what has happened to them is! You have only lost them. They have cut themselves off from you—and they cannot put down the knife. Their punishment—if what you wish is for them to be punished—is so terrible that I dare not think of it! And I am quite sure

THE HOME-COMING

that you will not dare to think of it either, Padrona—until you have discovered a way to make it less!’

Walls of darkness closed about them, velvety and thick. Father Antonio, with a murmured word of blessing, melted away into the quick Italian twilight.

Lady Arabella sat as still as any stone. Her outer senses did not cease to work. She could see the fire-flies filling the grass with little tongues of light, innocuous flame.

She could hear the deep, hoarse chanting of the frogs, broken now and then by the piercing whistle of a bullfrog.

But behind the walls of her senses lay a darkness and a silence which nothing visited.

How could she break down these walls which she had so painfully and laboriously built up through the years, to hide her breaking heart?

She closed her eyes and sat so still that it seemed as if time passed without touching her. Pain rose to her lips, salt as the taste of death. Silently and stiffly the guardians of her mind withdrew one by one. Was it wholly pain to feel the sudden throng of their old images pour into her heart again?

She heard the names they used to call her by. She saw old laughter in their eyes. The long silence was pierced at last. The darkness within her lifted. Was this death or life that relaxed the tension of her body—so that she leaned back in her chair as if the invisible bonds of her being had been suddenly unloosed? She saw them both again. *Mélisande* with the bright eyes of youth: and then her husband’s face. Those lips which had sworn faith to her, those eyes which had poured into her stern fastidious spirit the ardours and endurances of love!

One by one her defences fell, and into her heart rushed her mortal enemy. She gazed into those eyes, where she had looked her youth away—the home of all her dreams. As she gazed, slowly the deep accumulation of her wrongs receded from her. Victor could never forget her, nor face, unburdened, the pre-occupation of this new love. He would know—as *Mélisande* would never know—under his swift kisses how starved those other lips must be which he had once so loved!

Victor’s pain rose like a tide out of the inner darkness of her

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

mind and swept her own pain out of her heart. A nightingale, close by, broke into sudden song. The insecure and bitter beauty of its singing was like the beauty of their disastrous love. They had not planned its beauty nor its pain.

Lady Arabella rose slowly, leaning against the cool stone of the balustrade, as one who is used to hardness. What could she find to heal their sufferings?

In a flash the point of her dilemma returned to her—she had forgotten it! She had never told Father Antonio why she had sent for him! She had meant to tell him of her visit to the kindly evasive specialist who had nevertheless made plain to her that she was near the end of her harsh pilgrimage.

She had intended to ask Father Antonio to promise her absolution without enforcing upon her a forgiveness which she could not feel, even in the face of death. She did not need that absolution now. She had passed beyond the altitude which tempts the arrogant to forgive. All she wanted was to restore to her husband and to Mélisande the love she had falsely let them think that they had forfeited.

What could she do to show them her deep love—and yet to leave them free?

She turned and looked through the moonlit garden towards the Villa Beata—solid and at rest against the shadowy night. Could she not leave it to them? Would they not find in it the peace she had never found there?

With a long sigh of memory and relief, Lady Arabella turned and walked towards their home.

DOUBLE LIFE

The Reverend Bazely Blake took his ticket with slightly trembling fingers.

He thought of his sister Mary's mild, kind joke: 'Have you got the Four Last Things, Bazely?' she always said when he was starting off alone on a journey. Ecclesiastically speaking, the Four Last Things are Death, Judgement, Hell, and Heaven. But Mary meant Keys, Tickets, Passports, Money. She was not speaking ecclesiastically, she was making a joke.

Bazely was relieved to find, on looking through his pockets, that he had the Four Last Things. The boat-train moved on velvet out of the station. The sea heaved to the land. Foreign voices screamed alien desires into Bazely's nervously affronted ears. Claims were made upon him which he was conscientiously sure should have been contested.

If only Mary had been there to contest them for him! Still he did not blame Mary. He realized that she couldn't be in two places at once. They had talked it all over, and they had decided that the parish needed a prop, and that the *locum tenens* must be guided. With a faint feeling of relief, in which guilt mingled with indefinable fear, Bazely saw that he must go abroad alone, and take with him, without his usual counsellor, his sick body and his startled soul.

The specialist had explained quite reassuringly that Bazely's lungs were very lightly affected. Still they were affected. His own doctor had said, 'We must take precautions with your valuable life', and Bazely had secretly agreed in thinking that his life was valuable.

There was no reason why Bazely should not think so. He was a good man. The Ten Commandments were child's play to him. He had won a History First. He had been left an

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

orphan at the age of five and been brought up by his elder sister.

Mary was a calm, courageous, benevolent woman and did not completely spoil him.

She believed in letting children have a certain amount of rope, and only intervened at the last moment, in order to prevent their hanging themselves by it.

Bazely had not been too much of a prig at school. He sprinted well and was no mean bat, so that his more barbaric young companions had overlooked his orderly mind, with its religious twist.

Even at his Public School Bazely had never been bullied. Perhaps the candour of his blue eyes and their steady innocence had saved him. Bazely had ignored evil, generally because he did not know it when he saw it.

He went unsullied to the University at Cambridge, and there became a little isolated.

He did very well, however, and could have won a fellowship if he had had a little more personal drive. His bishop highly approved of him, and soon gave him exactly the kind of parish that Bazely had always wanted.

Bazely was forty-three and had never had a love affair. He had had romantic dreams. Beautiful, kind girls, fond of church services, had for many years haunted his empty hours. But the girls he came across were either beautiful and not very kind, or else they were far, far too kind and not very beautiful.

The last ten years Bazely had thought less and less about girls, and more and more about rock gardens. As his train jerked through the neat fields of France, his own rose-red vicarage hung wistfully before his eyes. The herbaceous border was not looking its best just now, in spite of Michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums; even the rock garden had a slightly stony, unravelled look. But it was all you could expect of a late November, and under the south wall, there was a violet bed full of strong, tall, deeply scented violets.

Then there was Henry. Of course, Bazely told himself, a little deprecatingly, Henry was only a cat.

Many of the clergy round him kept quite large dogs, and liked them; but Bazely had always preferred cats. Henry was a four-

DOUBLE LIFE

square, sedate striped tabby. A creature that knew his own mind and, when it was essential to his tastes, his master's.

There was a deep, soothing bond between Bazely and Henry. They took no liberties with each other. Each went his own way. Each approached the other with considerate diffidence and retreated without acrimony, if there was no response.

Henry wished to be understood; catered for; and not to have to ask. Bazely wished to be understood; catered for; and not to have to ask. Mary understood them both; was unquestioning; and catered.

In spite of the fact that Mary did all the manual work for Henry, prepared his meals, and opened and shut doors when Henry evinced the slightest wish to have them opened or shut, Henry was a man's cat. He preferred Bazely.

Henry would miss him; and Bazely knew that he was already missing Henry.

He turned his mind resolutely to France. France was not a country which Bazely greatly respected; it was either Roman Catholic or anti-clerical in its tastes (and Bazely thought that neither of these things was nice to be), and once at least revolutionary. Strange, when it was so near England! Of course England had once been revolutionary, too—but it had only killed its king and chipped statues. It had never really upset itself; and another king with the same name had been restored almost immediately.

A stippled scenery shot past Bazely's slightly critical eyes. The fields were pale and dignified, but without cattle. Lines of rigid poplars gave the land a formal look. Occasionally rather squat churches rose in the centre of concentrated villages. There seemed to be a good deal of manure about.

Farther south little hills rose up like bubbles; a soft blue dusk filled the hollows of the sky; at last darkness washed out each alien feature. Bazely tried to sleep. He hoped his legs, which were long and very thin, would not bother the fat man who shared a side with him. Bazely kept waking up and contracting his legs, while the fat man recklessly expanded in the slovenly way fat men have.

It was the first night for forty years that Bazely had not knelt down to say his prayers. Of course he said them, but rather

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

evasively and in jerks. He even thought of a likely word for his cross-word puzzle in the middle of the Lord's Prayer.

There could be no doubt, he told himself severely, that God was in a French railway carriage as much as in Saint Cyprian's Church at home, but He was less ostensibly present. The fat man snored. A commercial traveller on the opposite side stuck his legs across, and rested his feet on Bazely's part of the seat; practically on Bazely; nor did he take them off again when Bazely coughed and frowned. The long night seemed cut into a thousand jagged fragments. Bazely thought a little resentfully that Mary should have insisted on his taking a sleeper. He had been heroic about it, and Mary had let him be heroic. The worst of Mary was that, being so heroic herself, she sometimes took heroism rather for granted on the part of heroes; and very few heroes wish their heroism to be taken for granted by anyone, least of all by their sisters.

Bazely would not have minded the night so much if he had only known what lay ahead of him.

'I am not seriously ill,' he reminded himself reassuringly, 'or the doctor would have stopped my taking duty—even on the top of a mountain.' And he told himself further that even on the top of a mountain life cannot be so very different, to anyone whose soul is rooted in those two great realities—God and His Church.

Morning came at last, a thin grey affair, very cold. Huge lumps, not even awe-inspiring, but larger than anything Bazely had ever seen before, stood up out of the pale earth.

These were mountains. But they looked like rather unhealthy swellings upon the hide of some prehistoric animal. The feeling at the bottom of Bazely's heart at the sight of them was not religious ecstasy, but a confused peevishness.

Surely he had forgotten something? What was it? There was his rug, his two large suitcases, his small despatch-box? His overcoat and his muffler were on him, so were his gloves. What then could he have forgotten? He had forgotten his morning prayers! His first waking thought had been a bad-tempered dislike of the fat man, who by morning covered three-fourths of their side! It was six-thirty, not a nice time to find yourself shooting breakfastless up a mountain.

DOUBLE LIFE

The funicular hung at a terrific angle above the cold, misty valley. It was quite all right, of course, because the cable system of funiculars very rarely goes wrong, but if it did——! The funicular stopped with a sickening jerk. It was not however Death, but the sanatorium porter, who helped Bazely out with his things.

Bazely stood for a long, freezing moment upon a terrace above the little station.

Four thousand feet beneath him lay the valley. On the opposite side of it, shot—into the even pallor of the sky—three snowclad peaks. They were so high, so unbelievably and so cruelly pure, that they made Bazely feel more than ever in want of his breakfast.

The porter spoke excellent English and had red hair. 'It's a very short drive, sir!' he said reassuringly.

The sanatorium hung like a massive bird-cage on a shelf of land, overlooking the Rhône Valley.

Bazely was given breakfast at once, and then taken up to his room.

His room was large and spotless. It gave the impression of almost excessive emptiness. There was a south balcony; and all three peaks again. The valley appeared sunk, like his own heart, beneath the level of being.

A nurse came in and began to unpack his things. Bazely wanted to save her the trouble, but she explained that it was her business, and she had to; so Bazely tried not to mind her seeing his flannel pyjamas, and rather old hairbrushes.

The doctor looked in, a nice fellow, younger than Bazely, with a pleasant manner. He suggested—as a mere matter of form—that Bazely should spend the day in bed—after a nice hot bath. Bazely explained tentatively that he would rather like to go into the village and see his church first.

He had a feeling that he must insist on its importance at once, or else that the church might get a little overlooked.

The doctor seemed to understand what he felt. 'Of course, of course,' he said soothingly, 'and it's not far either. Still, why not wait to look at the church till the morning? It's only Tuesday. It's rather a small church, you know, and I'm afraid you'll find

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

not very many people up here go to it. Still they appreciate having one, no doubt!’

Bazely agreed to put off going to see his church until to-morrow.

He wired and wrote to Mary instead, and then took a nice warm bath and went to bed. He slept, uncramped; and when he woke up, he was given a delicious lunch on a tray.

Everything went very smoothly, and the young doctor agreed with the London specialist that there was not much wrong with Bazely’s lungs. He would just have to be careful for a few months.

But all day long Bazely was conscious of those terrific, untamed peaks staring at him across the gulf of air; and of a feeling of increased loneliness at the pit of his stomach.

The next day the sun still shone everywhere and in everything. The warmth ran through Bazely’s body like a current of fire. It made him feel that it was rather wonderful to have a body after all.

There was half an hour’s walk through the pine woods before you reached the village.

The wooden houses had a perfunctory, dishevelled look, as if they had been put up overnight, and would be hauled away by a careful housemaid in the morning. Down a narrow pathway tucked into a corner, under some pines, stood a dark little wooden hutch, and in front of it, on a signpost, was written: ‘Saint George’s Church’!

Inside, it was exactly like a church. There was an altar with white chrysanthemums, and a tiny brass lectern in the shape of an eagle. The eagle’s expression was strangely like that of the late Mr. Gladstone in a high collar.

The whole building was imprisoned in burning light like a fly in amber.

Bazely knelt down and tried to pray. There was nothing to hinder him. The familiar words trickled out dishearteningly into the golden silence.

Time did not pass; it seemed to be dancing, like the particles of transfigured dust in the long shaft of a sunbeam.

Bazely dragged himself up from his knees and sat down opposite the altar, trying to understand what was the matter

DOUBLE LIFE

with his soul. Was it the high altitude? The lethargy of illness? The air? The light? Why should the altar seem like a toy which he had outgrown? Why should his prayers sound to him like the pattering childishness of Mother Goose rhymes?

Where was the God of his fathers?

Time and space, Bazely told himself sternly, were without significance in the region of faith.

There were, indeed, many mansions, but God had built them all, and His minister should be able to find Him in any of them.

The Catholic and Apostolic Church was everywhere the same.

Bazely was still feeling a little tired from his journey. The doctor had suggested his not taking any week-day services at present. Sunday ones would be enough. Perhaps during the week Bazely might care to visit a little in the sanatorium—the cases who could not get up? This suggestion had frightened Bazely; indeed, it was one of the things he had wanted to pray about. It was an awkward truth, but Bazely did not like young people; and most of the lung patients in the sanatorium were young. Perhaps they never went to church even when they were well.

Bazely had always read about the modern young with resentment and distaste. They drank cocktails, they used eccentric language, and they seemed to have an ungovernable longing to cut short their clothes. However ill they were, they were almost certain to dislike clergymen. He knelt down again and prayed more earnestly that he might learn to like the young—that they might get better and that he might be able to help them. It was almost a pity that Mary was twelve years older than he was, and that they had always been such good companions.

Bazely walked back slowly through the slender pines. The sun beamed down on him and at every step he could inhale little gusts of pungent scent as sweet as honey.

The sky between the tall pink stems was a deep forget-me-not blue.

Bazely began visiting the bed-cases after tea. There were twenty of them, and five had 'No Visitors' on their doors, so that he did not have to bother about them. 'I shall pray for them!'

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

he told himself with a relieved feeling, because he felt that it would be much easier to pray for the patients he hadn't seen than for those he had.

The ones that had not got 'No Visitors' on the door, said 'Come in!' and looked at Bazely with grave, rather accusing, eyes. Still he soon found out that this was not because he was a clergyman, but only because he could walk about. These patients had all been in bed for months and some of them for a year, or two; and sometimes they resented patients who were able to live almost like anybody else.

They spoke with flat, unresonant voices, as if something had crushed the music out of them; but otherwise they did not seem ill.

They sat bolt upright in bed, and dealt with the difficult situation better than he did. Naturally Bazely never spoke to them about religion. Later on, he told himself, there might be a more favourable opportunity. Nor did he talk to them about their health; only one or two of them appeared to take any interest in this subject.

Bazely was amazed at their politeness. He had always been told that the modern young were rude. But these young people were not rude, they were almost formidably courteous. They discussed books or gardens; and one of them, a young girl called Rose Madden, discovered the existence of Henry and talked most enjoyably from that time on about cats. Some of them talked a little derisively about the sanatorium food; and, when they got to know Bazely better, about the habits of nurses and doctors—or their own relations.

This subject made Bazely feel a little uncomfortable, since surely relations are sacred? Some of the patients' relations lived up there on purpose to be near them. Was this not touching, and even beautiful? These young people seldom seemed to think so—they found their relations wearing. They did not want to be lived for—they wanted to live for themselves. Sometimes their ideas seemed to Bazely very wild and profane. He suspected that his own mild jokes bored them; and he was often, though he tried not to show it, shocked by theirs. Still they got on together. They really did get on. In spite of the fact that the patients were

DOUBLE LIFE

well nursed and cared for, Bazely found that there was a good deal he could do for them.

There were notes to be carried; books to be changed; things to bring back to them from the village; messages to be taken to their relations or friends. They wanted a non-conducting agent between themselves and the outer world, and Bazely eagerly assumed the duties of this objective Mercury. He learned that each of the patients had two lives. The life of their illness, a precarious business, which was a sort of state secret between patient, doctor, and nurse. This life had its own private jargon; its grim jokes; its desperate efforts and distresses; but it was not a life which the better-bred of the patients cared to share outside the professional ring.

Their second life was Bazely's business. It was more precarious still—a delicately balanced affair which might at any time become an incentive to get better, or wither away into a mere mechanical response, like saying 'Come in!' when Bazely knocked at the door. He had a feeling that if he could persuade the patients to like life enough, it would take away their interest from the symptoms of their illness and fix it instead upon the outside world.

They could not help being ill; they could not help their symptoms pulling them deeper and deeper into their illness. But if their attention could be diverted into a wider life; if anything from outside could be made to take the place of the dull weight they bore—would not the weight itself become lighter? Was there not in the life of the body something which could take the place of spiritual conversion? Could there not for these young people be a Newness of Life? This became the subject of Bazely's prayers—and the daily object of his visit.

But Bazely did not talk to the patients any more seriously because of his secret interest. He became, if anything, less serious with them. He brought them gramophone records, and learned to play 'Snap', backgammon, and Mah-Jong. To please a young man who was very ill—and very easily bored—Bazely even played *vingt et un* for penny points. He went to 'Harry's Bar' with another strange young man who felt very reckless—and drank a cocktail. Bazely had a feeling that if he had let the young

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

man go to 'Harry's Bar' alone, or had not drunk with him, the young man would have taken many more cocktails; and cocktails, Dr. Taylor had told Bazely, were even less good for lungs than Bazely had always supposed them to be for morals. Bazely allowed young girls to tell him stories which would have turned Mary purple and which did turn Bazely himself a pale mauve; still he could not help in time seeing that the young girls did not mean any very great harm by them. Rose Madden told him the worst of these stories, and he sometimes thought she meant the least harm.

On Sundays he went to church as usual and rang the bell for five minutes before each service. The bell broke the exquisite silence of the mountain air with a fire-cracker sound. Sometimes there were two or three middle-aged ladies to share his service with him. He had to preach to them about what God meant them to do, although he knew perfectly well that by now they would go on doing what they had always done, even if an angel from heaven, instead of a rather diffident clergyman, came down in order to change them.

At evensong there was sometimes no-one else at all. Bazely was alone with his God. He found it very trying.

At home Bazely would not have minded his church being empty. There were always four hundred years of prayer in it, and a sense of his own dignity to support him. But in this little wooden shanty, so high up on a bleak, indifferent mountain, Bazely felt his prayers fall back deadened upon his heart—as unresonant as the voices of the consumptive patients. Nor did he feel supported by any sense of his own dignity. The young people at the sanatorium had made him feel that they liked him better without his dignity. He would lock the little church carefully behind him, and hurry back rather guiltily to the brightly lighted sanatorium through the shadowy pines, with a queer feeling of release. Above him shone the cold and incommunicable stars. Nothing held him; nothing seemed prepared to look after him, or in the least expectant of his services.

He wrote to Mary very regularly. It was a little disheartening, he told her, how few people came to church; but fortunately there were other duties. He did not write very much about these

DOUBLE LIFE

other duties to Mary, because she wouldn't have understood why frivolous talks, and errands, and even games, should be duties. 'I don't bring them God!' Bazely thought with pained conscientiousness. 'I don't think I've got Him to bring! Not in the sense I thought I had—still there seems to be—a—a something——!'

One Sunday afternoon there was no-one in the church at all. The middle-aged ladies had colds, and the hotel porter had forgotten to put on the heating.

Bazely robed in his tiny vestry as usual, but when he went into his empty church and six stale chrysanthemums stared him ruefully in the face from the altar vases he hesitated, and went back guiltily into the vestry.

A verse from the Psalms sprang at him like an enemy: 'What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him?'

Bazely disrobed, and walked out into the snow. He felt that all the past was frozen out of him by the mountain cold. The great featureless peaks daunted him with their unconcern.

The comfortable details of his old life—Henry, Mary, and his garden—were they not more real to him than God and his soul? Which was the inner—which the outer life? If God and His Church were the more real, why did he miss Henry more than God? If he cared for His Church with a spiritual selfless love, why did he leave its services untaken—though he always wrote to Mary once a week?

Were those clerical meetings, those arguments—about ritual—and all the pleasant odds and ends of his parochial life, like the little details of the illness of a consumptive—a sort of jargon of the sick-room—a place to keep yourself well away from the harsh buffetings of the world? Were his young friends at the sanatorium ill because life had been too hard for them—and was he a clergyman of the Church of England for exactly the same reason? These thoughts were incredible and shocking, but they seized upon Bazely's imagination like the teeth of an icy wind.

When he reached the sanatorium, he felt more ill than he had ever felt before. There seemed a curious atmosphere in the big hygienic lounge. No-one was there except the redheaded porter

standing at his desk by the door. He looked oddly at Bazely, as if he wanted to tell him something, but had decided not to. He must have thought that Bazely was looking rather strange, too, for almost at once a waitress brought Bazely his tea, without his having rung for it.

While Bazely was drinking it, Dr. Taylor came downstairs and hovered about him, asking him kind but rather unnecessary questions.

When Bazely had nearly finished drinking his tea, Dr. Taylor said:

'I'm awfully sorry to bother you, for you look very tired—but you know Rose Madden? Well—she's had a very severe haemorrhage this afternoon—could you—would it bother you to come up and see her? I think she'd like it! She has no people up here, you know—and you've visited her quite often, haven't you?'

Bazely put down his cup carefully on the dainty yellow tray. Of course he knew Rose Madden very well indeed. She was the prettiest, and quite the most modern, of the patients he visited. She had said a most disconcerting thing to him once which had very greatly distressed him. She had actually asked him if he was quite sure that he liked the Church of England better than he liked Henry? A mere cat! It had been on the tip of his tongue to give her a severe rebuke, but he had left it there, reminding himself that she was ill and had been probably very badly brought up.

He had not supposed she would have a haemorrhage, in fact, he had not thought her severely ill at all. She was so light-hearted, and always wore such very smart bed-jackets.

Bazely had become quite clever at guessing the kind of records she liked best on the gramophone. There was a song about a prune which Rose seemed particularly fond of. Mary would have thought Rose rather a common girl. Rose said 'Cheerio!' when Bazely came into the room, and sometimes 'Good-bye-ee!' when he left it.

Bazely felt himself turning very red under the gaze of Dr. Taylor's eyes. They seemed to be telling him something which Bazely did not want to hear.

DOUBLE LIFE

'Of course! Of course!' Bazely said vaguely, getting up hurriedly and brushing the crumbs off his trousers. 'I'm very sorry—very sorry, indeed!' Privately he was also very much frightened. He had never seen a person in a haemorrhage before and he wanted to find out if Rose's had been stopped.

But when he crept into Rose's room, everything looked much as usual.

There was no sign of a haemorrhage. Rose was lying very low on her pillows, and there was a little gurgling sound in an oxygen cylinder near the bed. It was the only sound in the room, and until he got used to it, rather disconcerting.

A nurse got up from a chair by the bed, as the two men entered.

Rose's eyes met Bazely's with their usual slightly cynical smile, but her breath came precariously through her whitened lips.

'You mustn't talk!' Bazely told her nervously. And Rose did not. She only went on smiling at him.

Bazely's nervousness suddenly left him. He knew what to do. He took her hand in his; it was as hot as a flake of burning coal, and kneeling down beside the bed, he said the Lord's Prayer first, and then the Twenty-Third Psalm: 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.' Was the Lord Rose's shepherd? he found himself wondering. Sometimes it had struck him that she had not got a shepherd. She was a very young girl, not more than nineteen, and she had never told Bazely what it was that she wanted.

Bazely found himself wishing that he had brought her some flowers. The idea had occurred to him before, but he had been afraid of creating a precedent. He could not bring all the patients flowers.

When he had finished the Psalm, which had somehow or other comforted him very much, she whispered: 'That was nice! Say another of those!'

Bazely hesitated; and then he suddenly began to say the Magnificat. It was not very suitable for a death-bed; for by now Bazely knew that this was a death-bed; still, it had come into his head, and so he said it, in a low, musical voice, slowly and quite beautifully. When he came to: 'For He hath regarded the

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

lowliness of his hand-maiden and He that is mighty hath done for me great things,' he paused. Rose's eyes, meeting his, suddenly ceased to smile, and became fixed.

Dr. Taylor leaned forward on the other side of the bed and gave her an injection. He said, 'Go on!' to Bazely, so Bazely went on and finished the Magnificat.

'She's unconscious now,' Dr. Taylor murmured. 'It will be better if she stays so!'

Bazely rose to his feet and looked about the curiously quiet and empty room. It seemed full of Rose's old laughter.

'We'll leave her with nurse now, I think,' Dr. Taylor said. 'Don't give her any more oxygen,' he added to the nurse. 'Give her the injection later on, but only if she looks like coming round.'

When they were out in the passage, Dr. Taylor surprisingly murmured: 'She was very fond of you—you know—that's why I asked you—I mean, of course—one has to take these things into consideration, hasn't one? I hope you don't mind my having mentioned it.'

'Dear me!' said Bazely, nervously cracking the joints of his long fingers together. 'You don't say so! I hadn't the slightest idea of it. She seemed—generally—to be laughing at me!'

'Oh, I dare say she did laugh at you! They do, you know!' Dr Taylor explained. 'These young ones rather take their affections as a joke! It's better than if they pulled a long face about them, I think, don't you? Most of them get their hearts broken more than once! Anyhow, I thought she'd like your being there. It quieted her down like the morphine I gave her. I didn't want her to die in a haemorrhage or a fit of choking. There's practically no lung left. We won't let her come round again. I'm sorry I had to bother you, just when you were feeling so done up, and had taken your three services.'

'That doesn't matter at all,' Bazely answered him gravely. 'Not at all—those were not services——! I mean—not in comparison!'

He reached his door and saw that Dr. Taylor was holding out his hand to him.

'Well, that's of course rather the way I look at it myself,' Dr.

DOUBLE LIFE

Taylor said, with a smile. 'It was a lucky day for us when they sent us up a real parson! The usual brand aren't of much help to us here. But I saw at once you'd do . . .

'Don't worry about Rose—nothing could have saved her—not if you'd known before—not even if you'd cared too. Her number was up. She came here too late—and she knew it. You'll lie down for a bit, won't you? These things knock up the strongest of us.'

Bazely nodded. He could not have said anything more.

He went into his room, and shut the door behind him. His blinds were still undrawn. The valley lay in complete darkness. The moon was invisible, but her light had caught the three astonishing peaks. They blazed out of the dark with a gleam, as if the moon herself had rested on them.

'If I had stayed to take evensong,' Bazely said to himself, 'I should never have known that she cared for me!' And he fell upon his knees, and prayed quite easily.

THE GATE

When Prue awoke at dawn, she knew that her hour had come. She felt as a young soldier feels the night before his first battle; at the same time grave and excited. She longed to test her powers; and she was not certain if Fear were a friend or an enemy.

She got up and went to the window to let in the garden.

The garden lay motionless and attentive, waiting for the coming of the dawn.

The lawn ran up from the drawing-room window to the sky. It was cut across by two long herbaceous borders, filled to the brim with hidden flowers. The dark shadows of the distant fields were shut out by box hedges, cut rather badly, by Mute the gardener, into lumpy peacocks.

Prue could see the shapes of the tallest flowers, spires of hollyhock and delphiniums and the round heavy heads of Oriental poppies, but not their colours; a bird chuckled sleepily, as if it could see through the joke of the false dawn, and then fell asleep again.

The morning star shone like a tiny diamond window in the blank wall of the dark. A sheet of soft and sudden rain hurried across the garden, and was gone without disturbing anything.

The darkness grew thinner and thinner like the walls of a bubble, before it breaks.

The starlings began to chatter, as if they had thought of endless things to say during the night and must finish them off before they could begin to hunt for breakfast.

Prue drew in as long a breath as she dared, of the sweet strong air.

The first pains were sharp, but they had no unkindness in them; they only lashed at Prue like a natural force which has its business to perform whether you like it or not.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Uncle Tom, who was at the same time Prue's doctor and her uncle, had said to her, when he was explaining about the birth of babies, 'Nature's all right—if you'll only remember that she's got to be impersonal and that you've got to try to match her!'

Prue hadn't known quite what Uncle Tom meant; but she wasn't afraid of Nature. She had always loved the earth, and animals which move about spell-bound on their separate errands. She did not feel different from any of them.

She got back into bed, and beat her pillows high, so that she could look away from the room and into the garden.

For the room was stranger to her than out-of-doors. It was not her own.

Everything in the house was Ted's, and belonged to his life before he had met Prue.

When Prue first saw the purple-red house, drowsily hiding beneath shock-headed elms, with its big garden stretching out behind it and the golden-roofed barns, her heart had leaped with joy, and Ted had said, with the dogmatic untruthfulness of lovers, that it was all her own.

But when Prue came to live in it, she had found that it was less hers than half a bed in her overcrowded room at home, twenty miles away.

'You shall change anything you like,' Ted said when they came back from their enchanting honeymoon.

But Prue had seen that to change Ted's home would be to decrease an old store of happiness, even if his mother had not lived so close that she could see into their windows, across the orchard.

Ted's father had been killed in the war, when Ted was only twelve years old, and so Ted had become at once the head and centre of his mother's and sister's lives.

They were all, from the first, very kind to Prue—for Ted's sake.

Prue leaned back remembering those happy days of love before their homecoming. Their course had run as smoothly as the rich golden milk of Ted's fawn-coloured cows.

No-one wanted them to marry anyone else, nor did they have to wait for anything.

THE GATE

They had flashed into their joy as dragon-flies flash across a sunny stream.

The hollyhocks grew pink and yellow against the soft grey light. The Oriental poppies—red as blood—were still dark, but every now and then a cobweb sprang along the grass stirred by a sunbeam into a chain of diamonds.

Perhaps, Prue thought, if she had known about Charles before her marriage, she wouldn't have minded him so much afterwards.

It hadn't occurred to Ted to explain Charles. Charles had been his neighbour ever since they were born.

Charles's land was very like Ted's land. They went to the same school at the same age. Charles's father died of wounds. They didn't go to college. They both came home and farmed.

In the hunting season they hunted together. In the shooting season they shot over each other's coverts.

They drove the same make of car; and any conversation which they wanted to make they made together after their day's work was done, sitting with their pipes in their mouths and their dogs at their knees. Of course it was quite natural, Prue tried to remind herself, and if natural—right. Still Charles needn't have said, when they first met: 'So this is Prue, is it?'—just as if he thought it shouldn't have been Prue!

The pains grew distinctly worse. They seemed to get worse the more clearly Prue thought about Charles; and yet she couldn't stop thinking about Charles.

Uncle Tom had said: 'Always relax when you're in pain. It'll give you something else to think about; besides, it does actually relieve pain.'

So Prue relaxed. The pain went on, but only part of her mind went on with it. Perhaps she hadn't relaxed enough when she had first had to bear Charles?

If you are very much in love, Prue thought, and have to be alone all day long in a beautifully run house, with good old servants who look reproachful when you try to do things for yourself, your mind rather clings to grudges.

It wouldn't have been so hard if every thought Prue had in the day had not run straight to Ted's distant heart.

Prue wanted to share her thoughts with Ted with the same

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

dreadful eagerness with which Fan, the retriever, wished to share her sticks with Prue.

But Prue always met halfway those importunate signals—Fan's eyes and paw and tail—whereas Ted, even when she was there, preferred to talk to Charles.

Prue had never been jealous before her marriage. She did not know what this new, mean kind of anger was.

She felt as if a snake had bitten her and filled her clean veins with poison.

Even when Ted gave her his lover's eyes and hands and voice, she was harsh to him.

But was it enough for Ted to come back late in the evening and say: 'Like to turn on my bath-water?'

After he was dressed for dinner, Ted was more ready to hear what Prue had to say. But he was not feverishly anxious to listen, and not anxious at all to tell Prue all that he had experienced in her absence.

He had already talked over everything important with Charles; and Prue doubted if he thought a woman's day could be very important.

Ted had never had to listen to women before his marriage. Their conversation seemed to him to jump about so and stirred things up. His mother and sisters were not great talkers and got the worst of it over before he came into a room. But Prue's family had talked all day long. Even her father and brothers talked. They talked to Prue; and they liked her being fanciful.

Prue set her lips in a thin, firm line. This pain that she was bearing didn't matter. It would be over when it was once over; but that pain of stifled communication burned on, like an undying fire.

Pride had made Prue grow stubbornly silent, more silent than Ted wanted; and because women must lead up to love-making by conversation, because kisses only seem natural to them after tender words, Prue had grown extremely cold to Ted.

She couldn't explain what was wrong because that would have shown Ted that she minded Charles.

Ted would simply have laughed at the thought of Charles being enough to make a kiss turn cold. 'For what', he would

THE GATE

have asked naturally enough, 'has old Charles got to do with our kisses?'

Prue fixed her eyes on the herbaceous borders.

The garden was so crammed with light now that every flower shone as if the sun had just made it out of a fresh ray, and then poured a separate colour over it.

The Oriental poppies blazed, and the blue delphiniums mocked the sky. The sight of the garden vaguely hurt Prue. It had grown too busy on its pleasant errands and looked too effortlessly beautiful.

Prue had tried so fiercely to reach her lover's spirit before she gave it up.

Why could she not recapture that dazzling sense of their unity, when the lightest touch of his hand on hers had struck her whole body still, like the spell of a visiting god?

The small cold kisses she had given Ted since her marriage were not worth one of those tentative long looks when they had first known they loved each other, and not been sure of it. She had wanted to give Ted the whole of her being. All she was—and all she could never be—and yet might be, if she was sure he loved her!

Well! in a sense she had given him all. She had refused him nothing.

She had only had to put away so much that he didn't want that there was practically nothing left.

Nurse came in suddenly, though Prue, who never wanted to disturb anybody, hadn't rung for her. She gave a quick glance at Prue, and said:

'Ah, it's come, then! That's splendid!'

She told Prue lots of things she ought to do and Prue did them without making any fuss.

She had to walk up and down the room with Nurse holding her; and that stopped her thinking about Charles. It stopped her thinking at all.

Whenever Prue reached the window and looked into the shining garden, she tried to draw its peace into her fighting soul.

Every time a thrush sang or a blackbird called with its long, liquid whistle, Prue held her heart wide open to receive it.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

For a time there was a wonderful lull in the pain. Nurse made tea for them both, and they drank it together as if it were a sacrament.

Prue was back in bed now, and Nurse ran down to put the tea-things away, but Prue guessed it was to telephone to Uncle Tom.

They weren't going to tell Ted till they had to, so that he might have at least half his day's work in peace.

While Nurse was downstairs, Prue remembered how she had run into the orchard to tell Ted, when she first knew about the baby.

The apples were lying thick upon the grass as red as rubies. Up in the branches between the turning leaves were the unpicked apples, in clusters blown against a southwest sky. Prue was so excited that she was trembling with happiness. It seemed to her as if all the world was full of fruit made out of love, ready to give to lovers.

Charles had seen her coming, and with unusual tact had moved away. But Ted had called out after him: 'Don't go yet, old man! I want you to come and have another look at the barn!'

Prue had turned back without speaking to either of them, and gone into the house.

When she had *had* to tell Ted, she had broken into his joy by snapping at him:

'I suppose if it's a boy you'll want him to be called Charles!'

The memory of his hurt, surprised face caught her breath—like a fresh kind of pain.

Nurse came back, and almost directly afterwards Ted knocked at the door. The lull was over. But Prue sat up in bed and kissed Ted with a quick, soft kiss.

Ted's hands, which were large and very strong, held her with an exquisite lightness.

'Still all right, my sweet?' he asked tenderly.

Prue said steadily, 'Still all right!'

Nurse got Ted comfortably off before the sweat broke out on Prue's forehead.

At ten o'clock, Uncle Tom strolled in just as he used to when Prue had mumps or measles, as if his being so very casual made illnesses more casual too.

THE GATE

Uncle Tom stayed quite a long time, talking with his back to Prue, and looking out of the window at the easy flowers.

At last he said he'd go away for a bit and come back later, when Nurse sent for him.

Nurse had her lunch in the dressing-room next door, and Prue tried not to think it was cruel of her to be able to eat.

The garden was very busy all the morning. Birds screamed warnings to each other, a lawnmower whirred with intermittent zeal, like a friendly humming top, sending delicious whiffs of crushed and broken grass through the open window.

Cruel things were beautiful, Prue told herself; and she remembered how she had felt at dawn, as a young soldier remembers, in the havoc of the shambles, his eager innocence of the night before.

Prue had counted upon the pride of personal volition, but there was no personal volition. You just had to stand and receive a hurricane of pain.

Nurse came back. She talked no more now. Her floods of reassuring cheerfulness became short, sharp orders.

There was suddenly a great deal to be done; and not much time to do it in.

The sweat broke out on Nurse's forehead too. Her eyes, looking into Prue's, reflected the same urgency or else tried so hard not to reflect it that Prue, out of the deep irony of pain, could have smiled. For Nurse could give nothing away now. Prue knew it all.

This was the secret of the universe. When you had borne all that you could bear, pain released you—by breaking you to pieces.

To be free was to be broken to pieces.

Prue knew something now which Ted and Charles did not know.

It made her feel suddenly tender towards them both.

She could not feel now that they had driven her out in the cold. For what was their man's world to her? They had not meant to hide it. They had simply been working with different tools. This prize that she was fighting for now was her heritage.

In the stark middle of Eternity, Ted came into the room.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Nurse called out in a queer, strained voice, 'Please, only a moment!'

But there was something which Prue wanted to say to Ted.

She looked up at him, schooling back the anguish in her eyes.

'It's not so bad,' she gasped. 'It's nothing—like so bad—as I'd thought it would be!'

She stopped speaking, because she saw that Ted had something to show her, too.

Ted, who never really liked showing anybody anything—especially not a feeling—looked down at Prue, and bared the whole of his heart, to meet her eyes. Curious how, if you listen long enough—or is it deep enough?—the silence of a lover can speak plainer than any words! Only you must know how to listen. Pain must have taught you how.

Prue, keeping on Ted the kindness of her emptied eyes, knew all he felt for her, and steadied her fighting soul by it.

'Now please go, Mr. Arkwright!' Nurse said quickly, 'and ask the doctor to come straight up!'

Uncle Tom, who must have been downstairs all the time, came straight up.

He gave one sharp, long look at Prue, and then muttered: 'All right! All right! You'll have no more of this, my girl! Now breathe deep!'

An earthquake was upon Prue; but she breathed deep—and her soul rushed past her and escaped.

When Prue woke, she thought at first that she was lying in a different room—different but not strange. It was only a change of light. The room was still the same; but now she knew that it was hers. The garden was full of a golden glow, as bright as dawn, but softer.

The long summer's day was turning, unhurryingly, towards the dark.

A voice from a long way off cried: 'Lie very still! It's quite all right! You've got a splendid boy!'

A slow and peaceful triumph stole over Prue.

She tried to speak, but no words came, only her lips moved.

The voice said: 'She wants to see her husband, Nurse.'

THE GATE

At the time Prue thought it was the voice of God reaching her thoughts, but it was only the voice of Uncle Tom.

Pain was in the room still, but it was no longer an enemy. It did not touch Prue's heart.

She was lying too low in bed to see anything in the garden, except the golden glow. But she could hear the hunting swallows' short cries of triumph as they dived into the last light.

The door was a long way off. Prue could not see it open, but she could see Ted leaning over her again. Ted with strange eyes full of tears, for he could not quite hide the mortal risk at the core of his happiness.

He knelt down by Prue's bed and kissed her hand, as if he thought it might break under the weight of his lips. He could not speak.

Prue found her voice and whispered, 'It's alive! It's a boy!—it's ours!'

She said these things very slowly, with long pauses between them because the words had to be carefully shepherded together and brought from some distant place.

Each time she spoke she felt Ted's light and tender kisses, answering her. You would not think a man's lips could rest so lightly and yet carry his whole heart in a kiss.

'Ted!' Prue said, holding on to something which might break—but must be held on to, 'Ted—I want him to be—called—Charles.'

FOUND

When Anna opened her eyes her heart gave a great bound and stood still. It knew, before her mind, what was going to happen.

The blue dawn filled her clean little wooden room with delicate azure light. There was no sound except the muffled turning of the oxen in their byre. The sweet odour of their breath came up between the boards at her feet.

Anna got up stiffly and stood at her open window. The swallows had left long ago, and all the singing birds; only the hawks were left; and hawks, until they strike, make no sound.

The rounded head of the Hohe Mund, rigid and bare as a washed slate, filled the sky.

From the mountain's foot the empty October fields ran down towards the chalet, sparkling with dew.

The air had a sweet, keen taste like the first bite of an apple. Anna couldn't get out of it by thinking it wasn't going to be a fine day.

She moved mechanically to the wash-basin and plunged her face into ice-cold water. She washed her hands and her arms up to the armpits.

One of the summer visitors had left behind them their dog's brush and an old comb. Anna had cleaned the brush and comb very carefully, and with these she finished her toilet.

She was twenty-six years old. She had straight, rather thin, corn-coloured hair, and sky-blue eyes. Her face was weather-beaten and burned by the sun, but it was a pleasant face, without ill-humour or any meanness.

Anna tied a blue handkerchief round her head and crept softly down a precipitous small staircase, out through the barn and into the nearest meadow.

'Mietze! Mietze!' she called. Instantly the lamb ran to meet her.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Perhaps she oughtn't to have called it 'Mietze'. The priest said names were only for Christians, but from the moment Anna had found the lamb, in the snow by its dying mother, she had loved it like a Christian.

Today it would have to go to the butcher's.

Without pressure from her family, and quite without hostility towards them, Anna accepted the lamb's fate. No animal was ever ill-fed or ill-treated by the Spiegel family, but it was expected to fulfil its offices. Cows should give milk, hens should lay eggs, cats must kill mice, and calves and lambs must go—when their hour struck—to the butcher's.

Sighs of pity or smiles of amusement for the animal creation were quite in order in the Spiegel family, but none of the others had ever mixed up their heart-strings with a beast's life. Anna was the weakest and youngest of the family. They allowed her a margin for emotion. She had once been given a doll; but they were too kind to let her think that she could interfere with Fate.

When the time came—and Father Spiegel gave Anna its extreme limit—he fixed his sly, inscrutable eyes upon her and said: 'Well, my girl, that lamb's well-nigh a sheep. We must be thinking of getting rid of it before winter.'

Father Spiegel's word was law; and Anna never dreamed of disputing it. She was very proud of her father.

At sixty he was bowed and wrinkled and moved slowly like an old man, but his appearance was deceptive, for he was as tough and slippery as a mountain ash, and could get more out of an ox or an axe than even his son Joseph.

Father Spiegel waited a week after his first warning, then he said before them all at table: 'The butcher wants our young sheep tomorrow.'

Anna looked at her mother.

Mother Spiegel was a tall, straight woman who loved her children but disliked speech. What she wanted she got for herself, or did without. She had never been heard to ask anybody for anything. She knew that she could not save Anna's lamb, so she met her daughter's anxious eyes without any promise of relief.

FOUND

There had been moments when Mother Spiegel did not like killing her own hens; still she had always killed them.

When Anna saw that her mother could do nothing for her either, she thought for a moment of God; but God had made butchers as well as lambs, and when it came to sparing, He would, Anna thought, more probably spare the butcher. The Virgin, though she could be trusted to have a leaning towards lambs, had not been able even to save her own.

Anna dropped her eyes on her plate and pushed her spoon into her stiffened mouth, and went on eating. That was yesterday, and she had slept like a stone all night; and waked into that consciousness of evil preserved, which disfigures life.

She stood for a moment on the stone steps of the Spiegel house, opposite the neighbours'.

Across the small plateau, beyond the byre, on the other side of the well, which they both shared, stood the neighbours' house. The Spiegels could see their neighbours, and be seen by them, every time one of them came in or out. They sometimes spoke to them, but not often, and had been on good terms with them for forty years.

All Spiegels kept secrets. Their own if they had any, and other people's if they hadn't. Why should they part with anything if it wasn't necessary?

Anna had kept a secret for six years. Her secret was the way Hermann, the neighbours' son, looked at her if no-one else was there. He looked and looked, as if he were seeing beyond the brightness of her eyes into her clean, secret heart.

Anna did not object to this look. Something in her own heart moved vaguely but persistently towards him. When she was not thinking of anything else, she always thought of Hermann.

But Anna was afraid of men, and did not want to have any direct dealings with them. Her eldest sister, Marie, had had several offers. No-one knew quite how many or why she had refused them all. But there she was at thirty-two, round and rosy as an apple, with a perpetual sparkle in her eyes and a joke on her tongue, as if her single life agreed with her. Anna's second sister, Paula, lived in a big village thirty miles away, and worked in a grand hotel. Anna often thought of Paula with

distaste. It was said that she had offers all the time, and rarely refused any of them.

Perhaps it was the thought of Paula that made Anna avoid Hermann, for she was fiercely chaste and hated to think of Paula's fluid heart. Marriage was not unblessed the priest said; but Anna would have to give up her little lonely room that looked out on the Hohe Mund and smelt of the cows' breath. Her mother would not be there like a strong rock to cling to. Nor Joseph and Marie, who teased her often, but did the work that Anna least liked doing.

Anna looked across at Hermann's house and wondered if she had been wise to shut her heart against him. It was all over now. She knew it could not be reopened, and she had done it herself. She had watched to see Hermann go out of his house, and gone some other way. She had stopped going to the well till he had finished watering his cows. When she was forced to meet him in the church porch or on the Seefeld road, she had spoken a swift *gruss*, with her eyes turned away.

She had gone on doing this for several years; and Hermann had never said anything. By and by the tug at her heart grew less; and she should have been pleased when the village gossip told her that Hermann had taken up with a girl from Telfs.

It was just after she had heard this that Anna found the lamb in the snow. Sometimes, when she was petting it the image of Hermann came into her mind instead. It was as if she were speaking tenderly to him, or laying her hand upon his curls.

'He is kind to animals,' she thought, as she looked at the neighbours' house. 'He found my white kitten for me when it was lost!'

It would have been nice to have told Hermann what she felt about the lamb; or, if he had known without being told, it would have been nicer still.

The lamb was in the Spiegels' meadow, and ran to meet Anna directly the gate clicked. The lamb knew that it was Anna before she heard her voice.

It was queer to think that without words such a stream of confidence and sympathy could flow between a girl and an animal.

FOUND

When they came out of sight of the houses, Anna stopped. The lamb, a very elderly lamb, practically a sheep, cropped sedately by her side. A tiny stream gurgled between the long grasses down the steep meadow. This was Anna's favourite seat: a small grass mound under a mountain ash, which had caught itself in the cleft of a rock above a waterfall.

Anna sat down on the grass. The autumn crocuses floated about the meadow, as if their pale pink cups were bubbles blown by a hidden God, out of the spendthrift earth. They were fragile-looking flowers, like the children of old parents. Light ran through them, without deepening the colour of their petals. They seemed to know, before it was there, that the snow was coming.

Two thousand feet below the meadow, the early sun struck long loops of the river into gold. The mountains were bare and blue with distance. The villages on the valley floor looked small and unprotected. Anna had no wish to go down into the valley. Once she had been as far as Innsbruck. She thought of Innsbruck now—a great scrambling place, full of houses and towers, with people pouring through its streets in a procession that never stopped. The traffic in the streets had filled her with surprise and terror. How could you be sure of ever coming out of it alive? And what could you do, even if you went on living, in so alien an element? Beyond a tormented horse or two, or a nimble dog, saving its life by a miracle, there were no animals. There was no silence, no open meadow, no uninterrupted sky. Only this crowd of men and women finding life as difficult as you found it yourself.

Anna's eyes left the valley and rested on Mietze contentedly cropping. Mietze knew nothing but the sweetness of grass and the gentleness of Anna's voice. She did not have to do anything about love or danger, nor share the hideous storm of terror which broke through Anna's heart.

Anna knew by the light what time it was. Time moved on and on, like the Will of God; emptying the heart, as it emptied the crocus cups of gold.

Father Spiegel would soon be saying prayers, then they would all sit down to breakfast; then the field work would begin.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

'I will take Mietze myself,' Anna thought, 'after breakfast. That will be best. If she is with me, she will suspect nothing.'

When prayers were over, Marie said, with casual cheerfulness, but without looking at Anna: 'I can easily go into Seefeld today. This new family wants meat. I could fetch it and take in the lamb at the same time.'

Mother Spiegel stopped eating. Marie meant to be kind, but that didn't help Anna. They all meant to be kind, even Father Spiegel, who suddenly put too much milk-soup into her plate.

'No,' Anna said steadily, 'I will go into Seefeld with the lamb myself.'

None of them said anything more about it, but they looked relieved. Anna was going to be sensible, after all!

They were a family that thought the best advice was bad. To help each other was good; but to say nothing about it was better. Joseph stopped Anna on his way to the byre and gave her a quick, sidelong glance. Joseph looked exactly like a woodcut of Saint John the Baptist in the desert, during the week; but on Sundays he looked like any other young man.

'Look here!' Joseph said, in a hoarse whisper, 'I shall be taking wood in—after cutting it—by six o'clock. You could keep Mietze till then!'

It meant nearly a whole day more, and not having to see what happened at the end of it. And it wasn't as if Mietze didn't like Joseph. All animals liked Joseph, even pigs. Still Mietze might feel it strange to go far away into the Seefeld Valley without Anna, and on her last day she mustn't be made to feel strange. So Anna shook her head, and Joseph went into the dark stall and came out again with his large creamy oxen, and Anna watched them go off, creaking peacefully, into the woods.

Anna had work in the fields to do, but if she chose to do no work today and double work tomorrow, no-one would reproach her for it.

She called 'Mietze! Mietze!' and the lamb, which had been waiting for her near the corner of the house, bundled swiftly after her like a good dog.

They went up through the woods and into the High Meadows;

FOUND

because if they took this long way round to Seefeld they would not meet anybody.

Anna loved the light patter of Mietze's feet. She tried to picture what it would be like to walk without that little friendly sound. She had never lost anyone by death before. During her lifetime only two people had died in the village, one a cross old man whom nobody missed, and one a baby, who had not had time to endear itself to anyone, except its mother.

The priest said that for Christians death was an easy matter. You went to Mass regularly, and did your duty, and when you died, the Church did the rest. Angels awaited your parting soul, and after a short time of penance you passed into endless bliss. The priest had, perhaps wisely, never described what endless bliss was like.

Anna thought that to walk in the High Meadows with the lamb, and without having to remember the butcher, would be near enough.

Mietze didn't care much about the woods, but she liked the High Meadows as much as Anna did, for then she could crop at will over limitless stretches of fresh sweet grass.

The day was soft and bright. Summer lingered in the air. The leaves hung thin and brittle on the trees, or floated off through the still air so imperceptibly loosened, that Anna wished Mietze had been a leaf and not a lamb.

There was no feeling of death in the serene and sunny air, but any time now the sky might fill with ragged clouds and the snow fall.

The silver birches stood so still that they hardly seemed alive, but hung like trees painted against a blue background. Above their delicate white stems their leaves had turned to patterns of bright gold.

In the open spaces pale blue columns of smoke rose from leaf fires. Anna loved their pungent, friendly smell. October was her favourite month. Almost all the visitors had gone, harvests were safely gathered in. The mountains were alone again—except for a few whortleberries, and the venturesome edelweiss, which young men picked, not for its beauty, but because it grew close to the sharpness of death.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

They had climbed so high above the valley that Anna could look down through the thinned tops of the slender birches. She could almost have stepped out onto their flickering, golden leaves.

Here and there a stream interrupted their progress, gleaming, white as a girl's arm, as it slipped over the hillside into the valley.

Anna had to coax the cautious, middle-aged Mietze through the shallow water. She was far too heavy to carry now. How loose and white the newborn lamb had lain in Anna's arms when she had carried it down the mountain-side through the fierce snowflakes! She had been afraid it would not live to reach the refuge of the kitchen fire; and only little by little, with endless patience, had she been able to coax it to suck rags dipped in warm milk, until at last she saw its little tail twitch and its glazed eyes turn bright.

It must be nearly noon now, or the grass, in the green glade they were crossing, would not shine as vividly as the young green of spring.

If only she could bring last spring back again! May had been the happiest month of Mietze's life. The tiny lamb had grown quite strong by then, and as inconsequential as a dream. Anna could never tell which would fly higher, its legs or its little woolly head. Everything twinkled about it; eyes, tiny hooves, and stout, small tail.

Anna turned in sudden panic, for Mietze had dropped out of sight behind a green wave of the meadow.

'Mietze! Mietze!' Anna called urgently. She saw the mountain above them; the wide green glade; the blue columns of leaf fires, but the valley and the hillside were as empty as a broken heart; and then suddenly over the brow of an emerald hillock, Mietze came pattering swiftly towards her; and the world filled again, because a tough woolly sheep was butting its thick head against her side.

The rest of the Spiegel family had cared less for Mietze since she had taken to butting, and kneeling down in a careful, jointed way like any other sheep, instead of flying through the air. But Anna's feelings had not changed simply because there was more of Mietze and she could not move about quite so fast. Anna ran

FOUND

her fingers through Mietze's thick white wool; but the feeling of panic did not die down in her. She trembled and turned cold. She could not save Mietze from anything, any more. Even the Queen of Heaven had not been able to keep her Lamb from the Cross.

Something that was stronger than women turned their protection in the end to danger.

The shadows were growing shorter. The light was nearly level above their heads. The air had become heavier than in the early morning. Suddenly the green bulb of Seefeld Church came into sight. It was time that they dropped down into the valley.

The first house on the Seefeld road had a white stuffed goose standing on a wooden shelf, above the well. When you had passed it you were in Seefeld. Before the houses came there was a green mound with six tall single larches growing on it. In the spring their feathery plumage was deep and green, but now in October they had thinned into ghosts. Each tree was as pale and wan as a candle-flame in daylight, and if you touched a twig it crumbled into dust.

After Anna and the lamb had passed the larches, the village broke upon them, in a rush. Before Anna had time to think, they stood in front of the painted wooden ox-head, which had real horns sticking out of it, above the butcher's shop.

The butcher was a kind man and a friend of the Spiegel family. He said: 'You cut along home, Anna, I'll attend to your lamb!'

But Anna said firmly: 'No! I'd rather see it killed myself. She'll come more quietly for me.'

The butcher understood the advantage of that. Mietze had followed Anna sedately down the roughly cobbled street, stepping delicately on her pointed hooves like a fine Venetian lady on wooden stilts in one of Carpaccio's pictures.

The slaughter-house stood not far away behind the butcher's shop. It was not worse than other slaughter-houses, but when you got inside it there was the smell of blood.

As Mietze followed Anna into the little slaughter-house, she smelt the blood and gave a frightened bleat.

'She must stand just here,' the butcher explained.

STORIES OF INNOCENCE

Anna nodded. She stood herself where Mietze must stand. The lamb pushed timidly against her, and Anna put her hands over Mietze's eyes and let her fingers sink into the soft wool.

'Now kill her quickly!' she said fiercely.

'You must stand away,' said the butcher; 'and if I were you, I'd turn my back.'

Anna stood away, but she did not turn her back. The Virgin in all the pictures stood close against the Cross.

The butcher struck mercifully with all his skill.

Anna heard the lamb's skull crack. She watched its feet slither under it, and saw it fall in a heap on its side. It twitched once or twice and was still.

Then Anna heard a shrill, terrible cry. She ran away from it into the street, and out of the village, and on and on, towards the High Meadows, but she could not get rid of that shrill crying because it came from her own throat. Even when her breath failed her, the cry ran on and on in her heart.

She ran until she found herself amongst the golden birches again. The deep impersonal silence of the heights invaded Anna, and stilled the stubborn crying in her heart. She covered her eyes with her hands, so that she should not see, by the long shadows on the grass, how late it was. She knew she must go home soon, with loneliness pricking at her heart.

Suddenly she was aware of a strange sound, someone breathing very hard and fast, close to her. Her hands fell from her eyes, and she saw Hermann a few feet away.

'I saw you go!' he stammered, 'this morning—with your lamb. I asked Marie where you were going. I followed you a long way off. I thought you might not like me to come with you. Then you went into the butcher's—I heard you cry—and I ran!'

Anna saw that Hermann still thought she might be angry, but strangely enough she was glad to think that he had been near her in the slaughter-house. She was so out of breath herself that she could scarcely speak at all, but, pressing her hands on her breast against her leaping heart, she gasped: 'Hermann—I heard her skull crack!'

FOUND

Hermann nodded. His big rough hands trembled and his eyes filled suddenly with tears. It was as if he knew how sharp and sudden a thing death could be.

A wonderful thing happened to Anna. That tide of feeling which had always wanted to reach Hermann, and had always been held back, released itself suddenly. All her pride, her fierceness, and her fears vanished. She took a step towards him. 'Hermann!' she said, 'I wanted—I always wanted——' She did not say what it was that she had always wanted.

She found herself clasped suddenly in Hermann's arms; she felt his heart beat hard against the fluttering of her own. His arms tightened round her.

'Nothing can reach me now—that is not kind!' Anna thought.

**STORIES
OF
EXPERIENCE**

THE TUG-OF-WAR

PART I

Neither of them had a single illusion left.

General Eustace St. Clair Montrose was over fifty, and had spent his full, single-minded, and battered life in getting his own way.

On the whole, he had succeeded in getting it, but he had not got anything else.

Madame Léonie Nibaud had left forty markedly behind her, and her accumulations (she had been occupied in laying up treasure for herself) had not been arranged principally with a view to heaven.

They measured the attraction which drew them together with the infallibility of repeated experience.

Sex had no secrets from them, and no continuities; but it was for both of them their principal diversion.

General Montrose was a tall, handsome man, with thick grey hair and eyebrows, dancing blue eyes, and a mouth like a steel trap.

He had a massive chin, which he thrust out a little in argument.

From his earliest youth he had fought and enjoyed fighting. All concessions that came to him without struggle he regarded in the light of grievances.

Conquest was his goal, but he always despised those who let him get there.

His character was of the same consistency as a perfectly made cricket-ball—hard, light, and capable of rebounding. It was not capable of any other flexibility.

He had a great many hearty tastes, but those for women, food, and flowers were predominant.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

General Montrose had married young and alienated both his children. His wife died after a few subdued years of unequal and, on the General's part, of unobservant companionship.

He had been strictly faithful to his marriage tie, and nourished an obscure resentment against it in consequence of this privation. He had, however, made up for it since.

Léonie Nibaud was less simple a spirit. There was the strain of the artist in her, but of the artist suppressed and supplanted.

She had had a voice which was a small fortune and beauty which was a greater one, and, being a strictly practical woman, she had given up the less for the greater.

Her experiences comprised a husband whom she had without difficulty or hostility divorced; a fortune permitting her a seclusion which took the form of the Ritz; and a daughter of twenty whom she had brought up in the purity ascribed to lilies.

She was herself, if not respectable, quite sufficiently respected.

Léonie's masseuse, her coiffeur, and her dressmaker were more intimate with her, and more necessary to her existence, than any other persons. The General's eyes as they travelled unceasingly over her presented appearance told of their combined success, without being aware of the extent of their influence.

Léonie was not slim, and it would have been better for her to have eaten fewer chocolates. But if her complexion was an art and her figure an increasing problem, her features were a gift of Nature, and her great provocative brown eyes, with their deep fringe of lashes, might have been thrust upon her direct from the hand of the least conscientious of the goddesses.

She used these organs without haste and without rest. They shut off from the General all the distractions of the great light room, full of flowered tables and the delicate April sunshine of Paris—the room, through which, during those black and crumbling years, all that France knew of pleasure ran uninterruptedly and clear, with no apparent regret for the abbreviated careers of its seekers.

Léonie noticed that during the third spring the class of men had deteriorated. There were fewer young and handsome specimens. The men, in that unending procession, which passed and

THE TUG-OF-WAR

passed, but never came again, were either as the man before her—of high rank and mature years—or they were weedy and belated types, and they were all more dissolute.

Leaves had ceased to be joyous and hopeful interludes in a soon to be triumphant business. The interludes had become feverish reactions of panic against the oncoming certainty of horror and death.

Those whom the gods loved had already received their final favour.

Léonie did not allow herself to dwell upon these disagreeable and vicarious sacrifices; but she noticed, because she was there to notice, the thinning-down of quality.

Léonie was the first Frenchwoman the General had met who did not say the war was terrible, or ask him when it was going to end. Nor did she put the responsibility of the next great push upon his shoulders. She refrained from any mention of the war, and when the General complimented her upon this conversational omission, Léonie shrugged her shoulders lightly.

'I am like that', she agreed, 'to what does not concern me. I cannot alter the conditions of war, and, as they do not involve me, they are (for me) the mountains in the moon.'

'It is an admirable philosophy,' admitted the General. 'But I wish to belong to the things that *do* concern you—may I ask what is your attitude towards them?'

Léonie glanced across the table at him speculatively, then her curved lips bent into a slow, delicious smile.

'Rest assured, Monsieur,' she murmured, 'you do concern me, and you will in time find out my attitude towards you.'

'I have not yet received much proof of it,' ventured the General, daring her with his sparkling eyes; 'I don't fail to appreciate the remarkably good lunch, or the more remarkable pleasure of your company, but, if you will allow me to say so, the additional company of the world that surrounds us takes off a little from the value of these benefits. I should have preferred to lunch with you alone.'

'Monsieur is very direct,' said Léonie, dropping the fringe of her long lashes. 'He wishes to go fast—and far.'

'Very fast and very far,' agreed the General. 'You see, my

leave is up tomorrow, and the pleasure of having met you is as yet incomplete.'

Léonie slowly raised her lashes, and their eyes met and lingered in each other's. Léonie's were all tenderness, and the General's all ardour, but the element of calculation ran beneath both these appearances, as surely as after the repast set before them they would have to meet their inconspicuously presented, but relentless, bill.

Léonie made no direct response to the General's appeal. She rose slowly, and said over her shoulder, 'We will take coffee in my room.'

The General followed her progress across the dining-room with discreet admiration.

This lovely Frenchwoman knew many things, and among them, how to walk.

She had no diffidence and no aggression. She moved as one who knows that her place in the world will never be disputed.

Madame Nibaud's private sitting-room was a bower of flowers.

She had not replaced the hotel furniture; she had simply drowned it.

Huge bowls of sweet and purple violets covered the tables. On the mantelpiece, and hanging above the violets, were single pink roses in tall, thin glasses, and tossed high against the pale grey walls were branches of almond blossom.

The General glanced appreciatively at the flowers; but he wasted no time. As the door closed behind them, Léonie felt his iron hands touch her waist and her shoulders, and with a single quick movement she was pressed against his heart.

She neither yielded to nor resisted his close embrace. She suffered it, in a silence that was without constraint.

When he had released her for a moment, she slipped out of his hands with instant self-possession, and opened the door between her sitting-room and the room adjoining it.

'Jeanne,' she said, 'have the kindness to make us some coffee, and leave the door open—I like the aroma.'

Then she sat down with her back to the light under a branch of almond blossom, and smiled at the General.

THE TUG-OF-WAR

'I have my maid make my coffee,' she explained quietly, 'because downstairs they make—something else. My friend,' she added, in a lower key, 'you use too much audacity.'

'Forgive me,' said the General, 'if I feel that it was not my audacity which was too great, but my opportunity that was too small. When do you intend to enlarge it?'

'And if I do not so intend?' she asked, with delicately lifted brows.

'Then you waste my time,' said the General coldly, 'and no woman, however charming, wastes my time for very long.'

Léonie sighed. 'You are a man of iron,' she murmured, 'so fierce, so irresistible, like your nation!'

'That is an advantage for you,' urged the General; 'I shall be the stronger friend.'

'Pardon me, Monsieur,' said Léonie, 'a lover is not a friend.'

'An ally, then, if you prefer it,' said the General. 'You are safe with me, at any rate—as long as our interests are the same.'

She was silent for a moment, as if she were considering the quality of this security.

'Ah!' she said at last, 'but how many other women have trusted you—how many, perhaps, trust you even now—in vain?'

'I will be perfectly frank with you, my General.'

'I have been, as you know, unhappily married—in fact, for many years I have been without either protection or companionship. I lived very strictly. I brought up my daughter. At length I married her, very successfully, very perfectly. She has had nothing to regret, and happiness is between her and knowledge.'

'Now I am alone again, and I am more free. When I have a fancy I follow it. I took a fancy to you—but I am not in so great a hurry as you are. I count, a little, my costs.'

'Yes,' said the General, 'that is very natural. What are they, your costs? I am willing to meet anything in reason.'

Léonie drew back a little and laughed with an amused exasperation.

'Ah!' she said, 'I do not mean what you mean! I am not financially expensive! You mistake your "genre". My costs are perhaps not quite so simple.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'I want an intimacy of the heart. I want, as it were, to be sure of you first—I will not say "for ever", but possibly for the day after tomorrow!'

The General pondered for a moment, then he said slowly: 'You are everything I like. I adore you. Until you let me make love to you, I cannot show you how much. I have to go now, whatever happens, but you may take it from me that I shall come back.'

Jeanne came in with the coffee. She carried on the small lacquered tray two golden glasses of liqueur. Jeanne was a pretty girl, and the General liked liqueur with his coffee, but he noticed neither of these additions to his comfort; his attention was wholly fixed upon Léonie.

'*Tiens,*' she said tranquilly, 'but I leave Paris. I have for the spring and summer a little villa near the sea. You could come there, perhaps—you and what you call your A.D.C.?'

'But is it too far from your portion of the line? *Non?*'

'My little villa is a few miles from Dieppe. I hope it is not too out of the way for you?'

The General's eyes did not flicker, but they hardened curiously for a moment. He was not at liberty to mention where his portion of the line was likely to be. Nor did he do so. He said, after a moment's pause: 'I run about a good deal in my car. I might blow in your way. Let me take down your address.'

It was a coincidence that the address Léonie mentioned to him was precisely sixteen miles from where the General's division would be stationed for the next two months. They were to be pulled out of the line, rested, and thrown in again for the battle of the Somme, and the General was one of the chosen few who knew the exact details of when and where this famous battle was going to take place.

'You might tell your maid', suggested the General, pocketing his address book with decision, 'that, as we now have both the coffee and the aroma, she is at liberty to shut the door.'

THE TUG-OF-WAR

PART II

Madame Nibaud's villa stood high above a sea of blossoming orchards. A rampart of softly rising far blue hills was between it and the gash across the face of France. It was a space of peace and golden fields; only occasionally between the clear and piercing songs of the spring birds sounded the distant, steady booming of the guns.

'Mon Plaisir' was an achievement both of beauty and luxury.

Nothing was irregular in it. Everything ministered punctually and without visible effort to the comfort and pleasure of its inhabitants.

The cooking was exactly what the General liked; he always averred that he had a simple taste in cooking, but it was a simplicity which had baffled thirteen cooks in nine months. His hours were his own. In the evenings he could listen, sitting at his ease on a sweet-scented terrace, to one of the best-trained voices in Europe.

During the day he had a most accomplished and perfectly attired companion always at his disposal and never in his way.

Madame Nibaud possessed an even temper and quick wits. Her tastes were almost identical with the General's. She did not care greatly for young men. She treated Captain Pollock, the General's handsome A.D.C., with a good-natured tolerance. Only when they were alone did this delicate indifference yield to the admiration which Captain Pollock sometimes felt was his due.

'What it must be,' she said on one of these occasions, 'to know the General's mind, to share his counsels, and perhaps even assist him (for I know how much he admires your intelligence) to arrive at his great decisions.

'I am sure there is nothing you do not know. For instance, sometimes as I look at you, I say to myself, "*Mon Dieu!* This young man controls destiny! He knows where the arm of the English is to be stretched out, in revenge for Verdun"—the very date is, I believe, behind your eyes!'

Captain Pollock very wisely dropped these signals of the

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

future. 'I assure you,' he murmured, in some confusion, 'the General tells me nothing, except what concerns me, and that has more to do with where I had better buy fish, than destiny.'

'Ah, the uncontrollable modesty of the Englishman!' Madame Nibaud replied. 'But I am so ignorant of war, I may easily be indiscreet. Frankly, I do not understand even the communiqués in the newspapers.'

'One thing alone I care to know. Is the General in danger? That is the only little satisfaction of a woman which I would like sometimes to demand of you, Captain Pollock. Can you not let me know when I may feel safe about him, and for how long?'

Captain Pollock referred her to the General himself; he knew rather more, after all, than where to buy fish.

Jeanne had more success with the General's chauffeur, this simple young man—chosen for the solidity of his nerves and his ability (he had had the advantage of having been reared in Billingsgate) to stand the General's language—told her precisely where the Division was. She learned, from his flattered responses to her interest in him, where they drove daily, and even on one occasion (when they went to an important conference) that the Commander-in-Chief was present; he had been pointed out to Pounce, who described him, a little to Jeanne's linguistic confusion as 'a bunch of red tape'.

Pounce had been particularly cautioned against mentioning any of these facts, but Jeanne's questions were always indirect; nor was he aware of the quantity of facts an indirect question can elicit from a flattered recipient, whose mind is concentrated upon the possibility of favours to come.

The General himself was less awake than usual. He was very much in love; he was almost involved. Hitherto his heart had been a caravanserai. Objects of his affection came and went; they even inhabited it simultaneously, but they never stayed for very long, and none of them had ever seriously interfered with his control of it. But Madame Nibaud reigned alone, she completely satisfied him; and she was the only woman he had known since his wife's death who was absolutely disinterested.

She was more than disinterested, she was recklessly and passionately generous.

THE TUG-OF-WAR

The General drank priceless wines daily, mysteriously overlooked and left in her cellars by her late husband, who had owned some of the best wines in France.

Léonie told the General plainly that she would give up her villa tomorrow and follow him at whatever distance the military exigencies permitted.

It was an expensive time, and she squandered money like water on his entertainment.

'What does it matter?' she said indifferently, when he urged her to be more economical. 'You take your life in your hand for France, and I, whose life is of no value, take my money, so that I may make your life, while it lasts, more bearable!

'Besides, never forget your life is mine!'

Sometimes the General nearly believed her, and it made him feel a little uncomfortable. His life was not Léonie's, it was England's; and sometimes it occurred to him that even as a necessary recreation Léonie took up rather too much of his attention.

She didn't interfere with his work, but the quality of the power he had for it lacked its old intensity.

Léonie was an extremely intelligent woman about everything but war; for that she had a blank and most incurious mind.

The only information she ever wanted from the General was when he was likely to be in danger. She could not be content with his assurance that as a Divisional General he practically never was.

'Nonsense,' she would say, with the only approach to sharpness he ever heard from her, 'those dreadful shells: they fall everywhere! When I say danger, I mean anywhere—wherever it is where the men—poor brutes—fight'

'I want to know always when you go near what you call the line! Then I may feel safer when I know you are not there!'

'When I am not with you,' said the General, 'I am not necessarily near any line. I am simply on duty. You must be content with that.'

'How am I to know that it is not other women you go to?' she demanded one evening, after dinner on the terrace. 'Duty—that is a fine broad word to use, it may cover many things.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'I don't know how you are to know,' replied the General coldly, 'if you won't take my word for it.'

'I take your word for everything, my friend,' Léonie murmured softly. 'Over and over in my heart I say it—the word of an Englishman.' She spread out her beautiful, bare, ringless hand. 'It is all I have, that word,' she said consideringly, 'and, do you know, it is enough for me—I ask no more!'

The General kissed her hand in silence; he was very glad that she was going to ask no more.

She rose slowly and went through the open French windows towards the piano.

'You have never heard me sing the *Marseillaise*, have you?' she asked. 'Well, I will sing it to you tonight. It used to be considered something.'

It was a quiet night, early in June; the orchards slumbered below them, the white blossoms were still as fallen snow, under a high full moon.

Below the terrace on which the General sat, a row of white and purple stocks sent up their perpetual sweetness out of the dark.

Far away a low, monotonous chorus of frogs made a mournful background to the silence.

Léonie touched the piano very lightly, and then the music of that most tragic, most brave, and most magnetic tune seized the evening and shook it stark awake.

There was no silence left and no peace in the garden. It was suddenly thronged with battles and with ghosts. Even the General was moved. There was nothing banal to him in those familiar tones; they smote upon him afresh with dignity and severe intent.

His eyes lost their hardness and became reflective. In a few weeks' time the sons of England would go forward in their thousands, in their tens of thousands, and would die.

There was no help for it; and on how well they died, and how hard they fought before they died, lay the issue of the profound and senseless tragedy which was impoverishing the world.

The General straightened himself and stood up; he looked over the moonlit garden and ceased to see the flowers.

THE TUG-OF-WAR

The white fields of the orchards below him changed to darker, sodden fields, torn up and broken, where no blossoms lay, only the flower of all the youth in France.

Léonie came to him and laid her hand softly upon his shoulder.

'Now,' she said, 'I am a Frenchwoman. I am ignorant of war, but I have been very patient. When will England strike? My friends tell me she is letting us stand and bleed ourselves white to save herself. For your sake, and for the sake of your honour, I want to free myself of doubt.'

'We shall strike soon,' said the General, and his lips closed over the words with ominous finality.

'Tell me,' she urged, 'the moment. I wish to pray for it.'

'If you want to pray,' replied the General, 'pray all the time. It will not be too much.'

'No! No!' she said urgently. 'Give me your faith! You trust me—you are a generous man! I have given you all I have—give me, then, this in return? Do you not see what it is for me to share the future with you? On my soul, I ask it of you!'

'But you must not ask it,' said the General firmly. 'It is the secret of England.'

'And to whom,' asked Léonie grandly, 'should England tell her secret but to France?'

It did not sound absurd, even to the General, who disliked rhetoric. The last note of the *Marseillaise* still held the listening air. The General looked at her gravely. 'No,' he said, 'I can't do that.'

Her lips quivered, and with the sudden abandon of a child she flung herself into his arms in a storm of tears.

'Ah!' she sobbed, 'tell me! Tell me! Don't you see I am exhausted—broken with the strain. I have not the *fermeté* of the English—I can bear no more—always my mind is on that moment of terror—I want—I fear it! I want it for France. And for you—how can I bear it? Give me a reprieve—a few days' rest—help my divided heart!'

'Do not let it be divided,' said the General, with unaccustomed gentleness. 'When we strike, it will be for the good of all of us, and I have told you before, I shall be in no great personal danger.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'Ah,' she said, dragging herself suddenly from his arms, 'you speak so calmly, so dispassionately! It is, after all, only I who suffer. Show me that you love me, not as you love—all those light women! Do you not remember what I asked of you—an intimacy of the heart? If I was a man and your friend you would not hide this from me—why, even Captain Pollock knows—what I may not be told!'

'Did he tell you that he knows?' asked the General grimly.

Léonie sobbed incoherently—something in the grimness of the General's voice warned her that, though she could easily destroy Captain Pollock by her answer, her cause might not be advanced by his destruction.

'No,' she murmured at length, 'he has not told me; but I know he knows—I feel it in him—as I feel it in you, Beloved. Oh, for the sake of our love together, for the sake of this little hour—tell me, and I ask no more questions. I am then like a wife, a soldier's wife—brave and content with a shared peril!'

'I should not tell my wife that,' said the General, 'and I should expect her to be brave without being told.'

'Ah,' said Léonie, 'but I am not a wife. I can only be brave if I am trusted—infinately trusted!'

The General bit his iron-grey moustache and thought deeply.

He was genuinely moved, and he had none of the obstinacy of a weak man against the appeals of a woman. He did trust Léonie: it had never for a moment occurred to him to doubt her. But he was, before everything else, a soldier, in possession of a military secret, and it was inconceivable to him that he should part with it; and yet many men do what is inconceivable. Even the General wavered for an instant.

Léonie's head was once more on his heart, her uplifted, beseeching eyes were full of a tormented love and supplication. She had never looked as beautiful as she looked now, and passion was the only power that ever shook the General's caution; but, even when he was reckless, he was not reckless for his country.

He bent his head and kissed her lips.

'Good!' he said; 'I'll trust you. The date is the twenty-ninth of June.' Then he gave a sigh of relief. He had appeased her, he

THE TUG-OF-WAR

could feel the tension of her whole figure relax in his arms, and he had told her a lie. The date he had given her was a fortnight after the actual one.

The General was to go to a conference at Headquarters on the following day, but that he did not tell Léonie. He merely gave his order to be called at six o'clock.

He did not even say good-bye to her; he left a note to say that he would return at the first possible moment.

He was in excellent spirits as the magnificent Rolls-Royce swung easily over the white roads. Léonie was all the dearer to him for her moment of weakness.

It was the first time that she had ever appeared to him weak, and he believed in, and secretly approved of, the instability of women.

He spoke to Captain Pollock about this feminine attribute, but Captain Pollock was not so responsive as usual. He looked uncomfortable. This annoyed the General, who greatly disliked anyone about him looking uncomfortable, unless he had made them so.

'What's the matter with you?' he asked sharply. 'You seem to have a flea in your ear this morning?'

'Well, I have rather, sir,' Captain Pollock admitted. 'You know Curtis—the I.O. I mean? I ran across him yesterday, and he told me the French people have sent him Madame Nibaud's name!'

'Madame Nibaud's name?' demanded the General. 'Well, of all the—— However, that's just like them—set of loose-witted old hens!'

'There was something else, sir,' Captain Pollock murmured, crimsoning and turning his unhappy eyes away from the General's blazing ones.

'Out with it!' snapped the General. 'I'm not a gun-shy retriever, am I? I ought to be used to departmental idiocy by this time.'

'They are censoring all her letters, sir.'

'What the hell?' thundered the outraged General.

'And I gather they advise', finished the now desperate Pollock, 'our people taking the same steps with regard to yours.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'My letters?' gasped the General. Then his mouth shut. He had gone beyond the mere forms of speech, however decorated. Nor did he open his mouth again till they had pulled up at Army H.Q.

The General dismissed Captain Pollock after giving him a few curt orders, and strode into the dining-room of an old French chateau, where the conference was to be held.

He eyed a collection of gilded mirrors on each side of the long, narrow room with secret discomfort; but he had after all taken his precautions against anything sharper than discomfort. He greeted his colleagues briefly and took his place.

Everything went smoothly, and a little interminably, until the Army Commander said he had an announcement to make. He gathered their eyes in his, and leaning over the table spoke, slowly and distinctly.

He had, he explained, to submit to them an alteration in the date of the offensive. It was thought better in certain quarters to postpone it for a fortnight, the attack would therefore now take place upon the twenty-ninth of June.

General Montrose felt as if first his body and then his heart were turning to stone.

The perspiration that stood out on his forehead was icy cold, and the heat of the room was powerless to reach him.

He had never known fear in his life, but the anger that shook him now was one of the forms of fear.

Nobody noticed his frozen stillness. In the excitement of the moment, conflicting opinions poured out upon the subject nearest all their hearts. His voice alone was unheard. He accepted the decision of his chief as final, as involuntarily and beyond all protest as if he had received a mortal wound.

As soon as the formal conference ended, the General excused himself. Captain Pollock had done what he was told and was therefore not immediately recoverable, but he had to pay for his obedience when he was found. The General's language tore through all his reasonable excuses like a prairie fire through dead leaves. Captain Pollock got hold of the chauffeur with an expedition beyond the powers of any other A.D.C. in the Force, only to be told that he was slower than a specified snail.

THE TUG-OF-WAR

Several times in their wild scrimmage through the landscape of France, they edged calamity by the thinness of a hair, but the General only urged them to drive faster.

They arrived at 'Mon Plaisir' before the first western shadows covered the green terrace.

Madame Nibaud was not at home. She had gone, suddenly, it appeared, to Paris, nor was she expected to return. Nobody knew quite where she could be found; she was to meet, it appeared, Monsieur Nibaud, at one of the amicable interviews which still occasionally took place between them to their mutual advantage. Monsieur Nibaud was a Swiss, and he ran a paper which was not very well thought of by the French police.

The General walked to and fro on the terrace for half an hour without speaking.

Captain Pollock watched him unhappily from the drawing-room window. It seemed to him that every time the General turned and passed him, he looked a year older.

At the end of the half-hour, the General gave him a signal.

'Send for the car again,' he said sternly. 'We must return to Headquarters.'

The General had been making up his mind whether to save himself or to save England, and he had decided that he could not save himself.

This was the price which Madame Nibaud had cost him.

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

Mrs. Henry Watkins loved going to church. She could not have told you why she loved it. It had perhaps less to do with religious motives than most people's reason for attending divine service; and she took no interest in other people's clothes.

She gazed long and fixedly at the stained-glass window in which Saint Peter, in a loose magenta blouse, was ladling salmon-coloured sardines out of a grass-green sea; but she did not really see Saint Peter or notice his sleight-of-hand preoccupation with the fish. She was simply having a nice, quiet time.

She always sat where she could most easily escape seeing the back of Henry Watkins's head. She had never liked the back of his head and twenty years' married life had only deepened her distaste for it.

Hetty and Paul sat between her and their father, and once or twice it had occurred to Mrs. Watkins as strange that she should owe the life of these two beloved beings to the man she hated.

It was no use pretending at this time of the day that she didn't hate Henry Watkins. She hated him with all the slow, quiet force of a slow, quiet nature.

She had hated him for some time before she discovered that she no longer loved him.

Mrs. Watkins always took a long time before she arrived at the recognition of a new truth; she would go on provisionally for years with a worn-out platitude, but when she once dropped it, she never returned to pick it up again; and she acted upon her discoveries.

The choir began to sing 'O God, Our Help in Ages Past'. Mrs. Watkins disliked this hymn; and she had never found God much of a help. She thought the verse that compared men's lives

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

to the flight of leaves was nonsense. Nobody could imagine Henry Watkins flying like a leaf.

The first lesson was more attractive. Mrs. Watkins enjoyed Jael's reception of Sisera. 'She brought him butter in a lordly dish,' boomed the curate. Henry Watkins ate a lot of butter, though he insisted, from motives of economy, upon its being Danish. Sisera, worn out with battle, slumbered. Jael took up the nail and carried out with efficiency and dispatch her inhospitable deed. Mrs. Watkins thought the nails in those days must have been larger than they are now and probably sharper at the end.

The curate cleared his throat a little over the story; it seemed to him to savour of brutality.

'Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' cried Sisera's mother.

Mrs. Watkins leaned back in her seat. Sisera was done for, his mother would never hear the sound of those returning chariot wheels.

Jael had permanently recouped herself for the butter.

A little later on the vicar swept out of his stall and up to the pulpit covered by the prolonged 'Amen' of the accompanying hymn. Henry looked at his watch and shut it with a click. Then his hard blue eyes closed suddenly—he had no eyelashes. Mrs. Watkins folded her hands in her lap and fixed her attention upon Saint Peter.

This was her nice, quiet time, and she spent it in considering how she could most easily kill Henry Watkins.

She was not in the least touched by the sight of her wedding ring. Her marriage had been an accident, one of those accidents that happened frequently twenty years ago, and which happen, though more seldom, now. An unhappy blunder of ignorance, inexperience, and family pressure.

She had liked making Henry Watkins jump, and her mother had explained to her that the tendency to jump on Henry's part was ardent, manly love, and that her own amused contemplation of the performance was deep womanly inclination.

It was then that Mrs. Watkins urged that she did not like the back of Henry's head. She had been told that it was immodest to notice it. His means were excellent and her own parents were

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

poor. Twenty years ago Mrs. Watkins had known very little about life, and what she did know she was tempted to enjoy. She knew a good deal about it now, and she had long ago outgrown the temptation to enjoy it.

Still, that in itself wouldn't have given her any idea of killing her husband. She was a just woman and she knew that her husband had not invented the universe; if he had, she thought it would have been more unpleasant still.

Henry's idea of marriage was very direct; he knew that he had done his wife an enormous favour. She was penniless and he had the money; she was to come to him for every penny and all she had was his as a matter of course. She could do him no favours, she had no rights, and her preferences were silly.

It had occurred to Mrs. Watkins in one awful moment of early resentment that she would rather be bought by a great many men than by one. There would be more variety, and some of them, at least, wouldn't be like Henry.

Then her children came; she aged very rapidly. Nothing is so bad for the personal appearance as the complete abrogation of self-respect. Henry continually threw her birthdays in her teeth. 'A woman of your age,' he would say with deep contempt.

He was a man of favourite phrases. Mrs. Watkins was not constitutionally averse to repetition, but the repetition of a phrase that means to hurt can be curiously unpleasant. Still, as her mother had pointed out to her long ago, you can get used to the unpleasant.

She never complained, and her father and mother were gratefully conscious of how soon she had settled down.

But there was a strange fallacy that lingered deep in Mrs. Watkins's heart.

She had given up her rights as a woman, since presumably her marriage necessitated the sacrifice. But she believed that she would be allowed the rights of a mother. This, of course, was where she made her mistake.

Henry Watkins meant to be master in his own house. The house was his own, so was his wife, so were his children.

There is no division of property where there is one master. This was a great religious truth to Henry, so that when his son

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

displeased him he thrashed him, and when his daughter got in his way he bullied her.

Mrs. Watkins disputed this right, not once but many times, till she found the results were worse for the children. Then she dropped her opposition. Henry Watkins saw that she had learned her lesson.

Nothing happened to alter either her attitude or Henry's.

They went to the same church twice every Sunday, except when it rained; and they ate roast beef afterward.

In spite of Henry, Hetty had grown into a charming, slightly nervous young woman, and in spite of Henry, Paul had become a clever, highly strung, regrettably artistic young man.

But if Henry couldn't help their temperaments, he could put his foot down about their future.

Paul should go into the bank and learn to be a man (by learning to be a man, Henry meant learning to care more for money than for anything else); and Hetty should receive no assistance towards marrying an impecunious young architect to whom she had taken a fancy.

Hetty could do as she chose; she could marry Henry's old friend Baddeley who had a decent income; or she could stay at home and pretend to be ill; but she certainly shouldn't throw herself away on a young fool who hadn't the means (rather fortunately, as it happened) to support her.

Henry looked at his watch; the sermon had already lasted twenty minutes.

Mrs. Watkins went over once more in her mind how she had better do it. 'And now to God the Father,' said the vicar. The sermon had lasted twenty-seven minutes, and Henry meant to point it out to the vicar in the vestry. 'Oh, what the joy and the glory must be!' sang the choir. 'And if I am hanged', said Mrs. Watkins to herself, 'they'll get the money just the same. I shall try not to be, because it would be so upsetting for them, poor young things; still it's wonderful what you can get over when you're young.'

'Keep the beef hot!' whispered Henry, as he set off for the vestry.

At dinner Henry made Hetty cry and leave the room. Paul flashed out in his sister's defence.

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

'You're unbearable, sir—why can't you leave us alone?'

His mother strangely interposed.

'Never mind, Paul,' she said. 'Let Father have his own way.'

Paul looked at her in astonishment; and Henry was extremely annoyed. He was perfectly capable of taking his own way, without his wife's interference, and he told her so.

It was the cook's day out, and the houseparlour-maid—a flighty creature—was upstairs in her room, trimming a new hat. There was no-one downstairs in the kitchen after dinner.

Paul went out, to smoke in the garden, and Hetty had gone to finish her tears in her own room. That was something Mrs. Watkins hadn't got; but she needed no place for finishing her tears, because she had never yet begun them. She did not see the use of tears.

Mrs. Watkins stood and looked at her husband as he sprawled at his ease in the most comfortable of the drawing-room chairs.

'Henry,' she said, 'would you like some of that sloe gin your brother sent you? You haven't tried it yet.'

'I don't mind trying a glass,' said Henry good-naturedly, yawning in her face.

His wife paused at the door. She came back a step or two. 'You've not changed your mind', she asked, 'about the children's futures?'

'No! Why should I change my mind?' said Henry. 'Do I ever change my mind? They can make as much fuss as they like, but the man who pays the piper calls the tune!'

'I've heard you say that before,' said his wife reflectively.

'I dare say you'll hear me say it again!' said Henry, with a laugh.

Mrs. Watkins's hand went towards the handle of the door; she did not think she would ever hear Henry say this favourite maxim again; but still she lingered.

'Hurry up with that liqueur!' said her husband.

Mrs. Watkins went into the pantry and took out a liqueur glass. She poured a little sloe gin into it, then she put down the bottle and left the pantry. She went into the children's darkroom—they were allowed that for their photography.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

She still had the glass in her hand. There was a bottle on the highest shelf. She took it down and measured it carefully with her eye. The children's manual of photography and the medical dictionary in Henry's dressing-room had been a great help to her.

She poured out into the deep red of the sloe gin some of the contents of the bottle; it looked very white and harmless and hardly smelt at all. She wondered if it was enough, and she tipped up the bottle a little to make sure. She used a good deal more than the medical dictionary had said was necessary, but the medical dictionary might have underestimated Henry's constitution. She put the bottle back where she found it, and returned to the pantry. There she filled up the liqueur glass with more sloe gin.

She saw Paul on a garden seat through the window. 'I wish you'd come out, Mother,' he said impatiently.

'I will in a minute, dear,' she answered quietly. Then she went back to her husband. 'Here it is, Henry,' she said.

'What a slow woman you are!' he grumbled. 'Still I must say you have a steady hand.'

She held the full glass towards him and watched him drink it in a gulp.

'It tastes damned odd,' said Henry thoughtfully. 'I don't think I shall take any more of it.'

Mrs. Watkins did not answer; she took up the liqueur glass and went back into the pantry.

She took out another glass, filled it with sloe gin, drank it, and put it on the table.

The first glass she slipped up her long sleeve, and then went out into the garden.

'I thought you were never coming, Mother!' Paul exclaimed. 'Oh, I do feel sick about everything! If this kind of thing goes on, I shall do something desperate! I know I shall. I sometimes think I should like to kill Father.'

Mrs. Watkins drew a long breath of relief. Once or twice lately it had occurred to her, while she was thinking things over in church, that Paul might get desperate and attack his father. He couldn't now.

'Don't talk like that, dear,' she said gently. 'I sometimes think

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

your father can't help himself. Besides, it's natural he should want you and Hetty to have money; he values money.'

'He doesn't want us to have it!' Paul exclaimed savagely. 'He only wants to keep us in his power because we haven't got it, and can't get away! What money has he ever given you—or ever let us have for our freedom?'

Mrs. Watkins looked up at the substantial house and around the well-stocked garden. Henry had gone in especially for cabbages. She looked as if she were listening for something.

'I don't like to hear you talk like that, Paul,' she said at last. 'I want you to go up to Hetty's room and bring her out into the garden. She ought to have some air. The days are beginning to draw in. It'll be church time presently.'

'But if I bring her down, won't *he* come out and upset her?'

'I don't think he is coming out again,' said Mrs. Watkins.

She watched her son disappear into the house, and then walked on into the thick shrubbery at the end of the garden. She slipped the liqueur glass out of her sleeve and broke it into fragments against the garden wall, then she covered the pieces with loose earth.

She had hardly finished before she heard a cry from the house. 'Mother! Mother! Oh, Mother!'

'I've done the best I can,' she said suddenly, between the kitchen garden and the house.

There was an inquest the following week, and Mrs. Watkins, dressed in decent black, gave evidence with methodical carefulness.

Her husband had been quite well before dinner, she explained. At dinner he had been a little disturbed with one of the children, but nothing out of the ordinary at all. He had merely said a few sharp words. After dinner he had gone to sit in the drawing-room, and at his request she had brought him a glass of sloe gin sent him by his brother; when he had finished it, she had carried the glass back into the pantry. She did not see him alive, again. The maids were not downstairs at the time. The glass was examined, the pantry was examined, the whole household was examined. The parlour-maid had hysterics, and the cook gave notice to the coroner for asking her if she kept her pans clean.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

The verdict was death through misadventure, though a medical officer declared that poison was evidently the cause.

It was considered possible that Henry had privately procured it and taken it himself.

It is true he had no motive for suicide, but there was still less motive for murder. Nobody wished ardently that Henry might live, but, on the other hand, nobody benefited by his interesting and mysterious death—that is to say, nobody but Henry's family; and it is not considered probable that well-dressed, respectable people benefit by a parent's death.

Mrs. Watkins was never tempted to confession; and she continued to gaze just as fixedly at Saint Peter and the sardines every Sunday. She thought about quite different subjects now; but she still had a nice, quiet time.

It was the day before Hetty's wedding to the young architect that Mrs. Watkins made her final approach to the question of her husband's death. She never referred to it afterwards.

'Do you know, Mummy, darling,' Hetty said, 'I was sure there were a dozen liqueur glasses in the cupboard. I always looked after them myself. Father was so particular about them; and they put back the horrid inquest one, I know, and yet I can only find eleven.'

Mrs. Watkins looked at her daughter with a curious expression; then she asked abruptly, 'Are you very happy, child?' Hetty assented radiantly. Her mother nodded. 'And Paul,' said Mrs. Watkins thoughtfully, 'he seems very contented about his painting. He wants me to go with him to Paris. He always did want to paint in Paris.'

'Paul can't be as happy as I am,' Hetty triumphantly assured her, 'because he hasn't got Dick—but it does seem as if both our wildest dreams had come true in the most extraordinary way, doesn't it, Mummy?'

Mrs. Watkins did not answer her daughter at once. She turned towards the cupboard. She seemed to be counting the broken set over again.

'Well, I don't think it matters about that liqueur glass,' she said finally. 'I'm not as particular as your father.'

THE SHUT DOOR

General Sir Malcolm MacKenzie glanced about the hotel bedroom with critical hostility. His hostility was always roused by what he could not control; and his critical faculties were so highly trained that he was unlikely to overlook any possible flaw; but whatever the room was like, he would have to put up with it for the night, for it was the best room in the best hotel on the lake. It was the height of the season, and the small Italian town was overcrowded.

According to the standards of the hotel, the room was dazzlingly clean; according to Sir Malcolm's, it was *just* clean.

There were two wash-basins, and two small hard white beds with mosquito-nettings.

There was a hole in the mosquito-netting which covered the bed Sir Malcolm had decided to sleep in. He had given the choice of beds to his wife; but she had known better than to take it. They were both too well-bred to show annoyance; but they had not shared a room with each other for years; and neither of them was pleased.

There was a balcony from which Sir Malcolm saw—without paying much attention to it—a small island floating on a sea of transparent rose-colour. The sun was setting. The mountains behind the island were a deep delphinium blue. Small rowboats with terra-cotta awnings crawled lazily, like burnished beetles, over the glassy stillness of the lake. The oars, rising and falling, cut the smooth surface into sudden ripples of bright gold. It was not the kind of place Sir Malcolm liked.

There was neither golf nor tennis. The town drained into the lake, which you were supposed to bathe in. From the look of the people in the hotel, bridge—if there were any—would be bad.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Nothing but Sir Malcolm's inveterate sense of fair play would have induced him to come to such a place.

His wife wanted to come. For the whole of his successful career, she had gone wherever he wanted, and done what would best serve his interests. She had adjusted her whole existence to suit Malcolm's.

He couldn't—thinking of the fourteen years they had spent together—have chosen a better wife. She had made no social blunders; she had a good seat on a horse; and she had never so much as looked at another man. She knew just as much about public affairs as most women did; and never spoke as if she knew more. Sir Malcolm was determined to let her have her innings. She should manage their house on her own lines—which were mercifully not unlike his own—and bring up their only child in the way they both thought children should be brought up. Now that his career was over, it was obviously her turn to do what she liked.

She had wanted to come to this queer little hole on the Italian lakes, where she had been as a girl. Perhaps she had had some kind of little love affair there. Malcolm hadn't asked her. He never asked her any personal questions. There was no intimacy between them. They were only man and wife.

It would be better to tell her about the hole in the mosquito-netting before they went to bed. She spoke Italian, and he didn't. Usually if there was any fault to find, Sir Malcolm preferred to find it himself. He found fault extremely well. For many years he had been in a position where his word was law, and this had made him both considerate and courteous—unless he suspected cheek.

He did not suspect cheek from Clara. On the contrary, if he had said, 'By the way, Clara, there is a hole in the mosquito-netting of my bed; I wish you'd speak about it,' he knew perfectly well that in her voice of cultured eagerness Clara would have exclaimed: 'Oh, *is* there, Malcolm? Yes, of course I will!' Then it would have been mended, and Malcolm could have slept in peace. And yet he could not speak to her about it—not to save his life!

He did not dislike her. He simply felt that as long as he lived,

THE SHUT DOOR

there would be nothing that he cared to ask her, or that she cared to tell him.

He knew every tone of her flat, cheerful voice, and every expression of her controlled and not very expressive face.

He was going to be bottled up with her for the rest of his life; and there was going to be a good deal of it, for he was only fifty-two and remarkably fit for his age.

Clara sat with her back to him, doing her hair, with placid, accustomed fingers.

They could have afforded a maid, but she liked to save unnecessary expense.

Malcolm looked over her head into the mirror.

It was a bitter relief to see his young, spare figure. His close-cut curly brown hair was greying at the temples, and the lines in his well-shaped decisive face were deep; but he didn't look perceptibly older than he had looked at forty. Nor did he feel any older, though his country, after covering him with second-class honours, and giving him a title, had dispensed with his further services.

He had ruled a province as large as a kingdom for twelve years. All its interests, its defects, and its capacities were as close to him as his blood. But he would never see his kingdom again, or use his hard-won knowledge.

Sir Malcolm was not without the physical resources of his type. He could hunt in the winter; he could shoot in the autumn; and for the summer months there were always golf, tennis, and swimming. His wife had money of her own. They were both good bridge-players. Politics excited him; and he often read books. Sir Malcolm was a more intelligent man than most retired generals, so that he had more imagination with which to feel the indignity of resources.

The job of loving, too, seemed over with the rest. . . . After Madeleine died, Sir Malcolm had known that his heart was definitely broken. He had decided, when he was capable of deciding anything, to marry, settle down, and have children. Clara had, very opportunely, come out just then, to stay with her brother, who was in command of the Central Provinces. Women were apt to like Malcolm; and Clara had liked him. He

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

never knew how much, because she had always behaved properly. After a time, though he would never have admitted it, he got over Madeleine's death, but no other woman had ever moved him.

Madeleine was everything that, in theory, Malcolm did not like; besides being unfaithful to her husband—quite a decent fellow—in order to give Malcolm the whole of her desperate heart.

She was untidy, unpunctual, often inaccurate; a brilliant, witty, irresponsible Irish girl, with black hair and jade-green eyes; always laughing, or wringing your heart with her tears. They'd had terrific times together, and hours of such bliss that when he thought of them—and he still thought of them sometimes—they made the rest of life seem like a darkened room.

Clara finished doing her hair and gave a brief glance at the result.

She was without vanity, and looked better, Malcolm thought, at forty-two, than she had at twenty-eight, when he had married her.

'I'm ready, Malcolm,' Clara said, meeting his controlled, dispassionate glance. 'I hope I haven't kept you waiting too long.'

'Oh, no, not in the least,' Malcolm replied politely. He couldn't be kept waiting too long now, he reminded himself; he had nothing to wait for, nor was there anything to be in any hurry about.

He opened the door for her, and they went downstairs together, side by side.

'I'm sorry about those people coming tonight,' Malcolm explained apologetically. 'I'm afraid they may bore you, rather; but I felt I had to invite them. Commander Erskine's brother was in my old regiment. The girl's not much more than a child, I hear—but he asked to bring her. Fortunately, he's a widower, so you needn't do much about them. We might row over to tea with them one day. They live on the island. Can't see what people see in islands myself!'

'I don't suppose they will bore me,' Clara replied kindly. 'It looks rather a nice little island.'

THE SHUT DOOR

'Nice' was the most important word in Clara's vocabulary. She used it indiscriminately, to describe flowers, children and animals, food or clothes. He had even heard her call a storm upon the Atlantic Ocean 'nice'. What did she mean by calling an island 'nice'?

He was too courteous to pull her up about it; but every time she used the word, he felt vaguely annoyed. He looked across the hall—and saw Chloe Erskine.

She had a bush of red-gold hair. Her eyes were large and very clear. He was not sure if they were hazel or grey, but they had a dancing flame in them. Her small face was coloured like a shell's. She was slender, without being flat; and she had very little on; quite natural in that heat, and becoming. Malcolm rather liked seeing women's figures, if they had any. This girl had a figure.

She looked as if she were being blown across the hall to meet him.

Just behind her stumped her stocky little father, a gallant Jack tar of a fellow, who had lost a leg at Zeebrugge. He hadn't two ideas to rub together. Neither he nor his daughter played bridge; Malcolm tried to tell himself that it would be a wasted evening. His heart, which had begun to beat unevenly, refused to listen. He was conscious of the girl's every movement. If she put a hand up to her hair, his heart went with it. If she looked away from him, his heart sank.

When her eyes met his, he tried to hold their wandering flame with his imperious, steady gaze; but he paid no direct attention to her. He was busy procuring the best table in the room, and choosing the most likely wine.

The headwaiter gravitated naturally to Sir Malcolm's side, and strained the resources of the hotel to meet his wishes. Sir Malcolm summed up the possibilities of the dinner with leisurely skill, and succeeded in getting a good one.

Then he talked to the Commander, for a time, as if the girl didn't exist. She was a very young girl, perhaps five years older than his own child Peggy. Clara was being kind to her. She was saying that either the fish or the Sacred Mountain—he couldn't quite hear which—was very nice. He went on talking to the

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Commander for about ten minutes. It must have gone all right, from the Commander's face; but Malcolm hadn't the faintest idea what either of them were talking about. Finally he *had* to turn to the girl. He had a curious dizzy feeling, as if he were a moth banging himself against light.

Chloe was very shy, and at the same time curiously alert and avid. Malcolm could feel the beat of her eagerness under her frightened, nervous talk.

Yes, she liked the island! Yes, she liked swimming and boating! Yes, it was lonely in the winters! She hadn't many friends. She liked reading; but she liked dancing better.

'Oh, well,' Malcolm agreed indulgently, 'I think you ought to—at your age! Isn't there some kind of dance on—in the village tonight? Shall we go down and take a look at it, after dinner?'

Her face lit up, at this; and Malcolm forgot to take any asparagus. Her eyes shone on him with a child's confident delight. He looked down hastily at his plate, and found that he had hardly eaten anything.

For the next few minutes he just ate; then he let himself look up, and said: 'We'll make a party, then, shall we—my wife and your father, you and I—and see what's up? These warm evenings are rather jolly to be out in. The insects aren't a patch on India!'

She said devoutly: 'Oh, I'd so love to go to India!'

She hadn't, of course, been anywhere, or seen anything. He found himself telling her about India. He explained that vast, arid, intricate, filthy, brilliant country to her—as he had never explained it before. He seemed to see it for the first time. She listened in an intent, intoxicating silence. She was so sure that every word he said was true that he found his familiar *clichés* breaking down before the admiring wonder of her eyes.

He must have got something into what he said, for neither of them noticed that dinner was over—nor knew how they had reached the piazza till they found themselves standing in the moonlight, listening to a gramophone wheezing out an aching, high-pitched jazz.

The piazza was filled with a chattering, laughing Italian crowd, unconcerned with foreigners, but taking everything in.

THE SHUT DOOR

Beyond the piazza, the island rose up out of the lake, and sank back again in long, unwavering reflections, more vivid than its actual substance.

Clara and the Commander sat as if nailed to their chairs in a café. What happened to them afterwards, Malcolm forgot.

He put his arms round the girl; and they danced. He knew from the first touch of her responsive body that she was already his. The same doom, insidious and sparkling, lay upon them both, with the weight of water.

Malcolm had long ago outgrown the vanity of the hunting male. He found Chloe's lack of resistance an incentive the more. Sometimes their eyes met gravely. Her forehead rested against his cheek; her body melted into his. The crowd swayed and shuffled, lurched and stumbled against them; but they were as unaware of it, as a solitary Atlantic wave in mid-ocean is unaware of the tumbling surf at the sea's edge.

The dances had to break up sometimes; and then Malcolm became conscious of a group of English people sitting near his wife. They tried to interfere, in the wellbred casual way of English people, who resent a breach of etiquette on the part of one of themselves.

They were on his wife's side against him. They thought he was behaving badly. Let them think so! His will, fully roused, was more than a match for them. He cut short their tactful intrusions with a determined ferocity.

The moment the music re-started, the girl was in his arms again. He felt the limitations of this public embrace unbearable.

'Can't we get away somewhere?' he asked hoarsely. 'On the lake, perhaps? Isn't there a boat we can get hold of?'

She said: 'Oh, yes! Do let's. There's ours! Father won't mind. He'll know I'll be all right with you!'

That stung Malcolm out of his trance. He had always repaid truth with honour. That was his creed. You could not let anybody down; and as his creed was short and the pinch had never been too dire, he had hitherto lived up to it.

Even now he hesitated. Chloe felt his hesitation, and said urgently, with the swift, fluttering pressure of her hand upon his arm: 'Oh, do—do come!' Apparently she felt no hesitation.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

She had the usual complete unscrupulousness of a woman in love; or rather she acknowledged only one duty—the supreme one of giving Malcolm what he wanted.

They slipped through the crowd, under an arch, down a flight of stairs, to the lake side.

'It is our boat,' Chloe explained, helping him to push it off into deep water.

A cypress, cutting the lake across, beckoned them, out of the moonlight, into darkness.

Malcolm shipped the oars, and moving cautiously towards Chloe, took her in his arms.

His thirsty lips found hers. She shivered and gave a little gasp, and then clung to him, as if she were clinging to life itself.

His heart changed in him, and threw off the years. She was so young! So slender! So alive! He felt mesmerized, as if he were twenty—more deeply mesmerized, for the self-consciousness of youth had left him.

He lived, for those few minutes, without a thought of self. He knew that to Chloe, the future meant no more than his own crumpled-up past meant to him. It was not wrong to take what she gave him! Her lips were as starved as his; youth's longing for the life it has never tasted can be as great as a man's last longing before the retreat of age. Something deeper than his code spoke in him and broke down the iron of his self-control. She lay against his shoulder as lightly as a flower lies, in an open hand.

'Look here,' he said, releasing her a little, 'tonight—if I come to you—will you let me in? Do you want me to come?'

'Yes! Oh, yes!' she whispered. 'I shall wait for you. I'll row you out to the island now—and show you where it is! It'll be heavenly if you'll come!'

She took up the oars and rowed across the strip of moonlight—over the long glitter of the reflections, into the shadow of a garden. The night was filled with the scent of myrtle. The delicate cool air was unbearably sweet. Once more Malcolm's conscience rode him.

'Look here,' he said again, 'it's a beastly shame to come to you! It's all wrong, you know! I'm all tied up. There's my wife—and my little girl—I can't break free!'

THE SHUT DOOR

She caught her breath, and groping for his hand, laid it against her heart.

'Oh, but what does all that matter?' she murmured. 'Don't let's think of afterwards! We have tonight. Just let's live! I never have! And I never may again. I'm yours! You can't help that, can you? Oh, it would be so dreadful *not* to be yours!'

'Don't be afraid,' Malcolm said quietly. 'I'm yours as much as you're mine. A good deal more, perhaps!' He put the rest of his life into the kiss he gave her. No-one could rob her of that—not even he himself.

Then he rowed back to the landing-stage opposite the café, where all the Italians were looking sympathetic, and all the English people deeply shocked.

The Commander said something curt about its being high time they were all home. It was apparently one o'clock in the morning.

Under the hard electric light Malcolm caught a glimpse of Clara's blank, well-bred face, rigid as a wooden doll's.

She was being rallied round by all the Kensingtonian English in the hotel. Malcolm felt rather sorry for her; to do her justice, Clara wouldn't like being rallied round. But he couldn't do anything to help her. They all sheered off from him as if he were a leper—all except one damned little snob, whose name Malcolm couldn't remember.

The fellow stuck to him like a leech. He appeared to think that it was worth his while to establish some kind of claim on a general, even a general in disgrace.

Malcolm strode up the steep hillside at a terrific rate, partly in the hope of shaking off the fellow's intrusive sympathy, and partly to outstrip the hostile flock of sheep surrounding his wife.

It felt queer to a man, who had always been the leader of sheep, to have a flock turn against him. Malcolm felt furious, yet at the same time unusually subdued.

If he hadn't been subdued, he would have made short work of the panting little toad at his side. 'Look here,' he would have said, 'do you mind dropping behind a bit—I want to be alone!' But he didn't say it. He even, after a time, was aware that the

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

fellow's company had a sort of reassurance about it. He didn't have to listen to the breathless patter the chap kept up.

The thoughts kept popping in and out of his mind as if he were alone. When he reached the hotel, he would get drunk. Anyhow, he'd drink enough to forget those shocked sheep, and the curt, restrained half-sentence the Commander had flung at him. What damned right had other people with your private affairs? What damned right had Clara to be upset—if upset she was? If only he could get rid of this flayed-alive feeling! He had always despised fellows who broke their codes. He had said they deserved all they got. But he had never felt shame before. Now he knew that shame was worse than anything a man could do. It got down into your vitals and gnawed at you like vermin.

What was it the child had said, as they were crossing the square—under the glare of all those hostile eyes? 'When you come—we'll have a heavenly bathe!'

She was only a child! Perhaps that was all she wanted—a sort of better-than-schoolgirl lark? But he knew it wasn't. She wanted—or would want—all that he did.

The hotel stumbled on him suddenly out of the dark. Tire-some officious servants buzzed round him.

He went into the smoking-room, and that fellow followed him. Other men came in soon, but none of the others spoke to him. Malcolm ordered and drank three stiff whiskies, one after the other.

He felt better then; but not much better—only angrier. The other men went to bed, one by one, without speaking to him. Finally the little toad went off—after an insufferably familiar farewell, as if he knew what Malcolm was up to, after he'd gone, and dared to sympathize with it. A servant hung about for another half-hour. Malcolm told the man, who didn't, of course, believe him, that he was going to smoke on the terrace. Then he went out into the dawn.

The alcohol died down in him. There was a queer, cool hush over everything. Not a tree moved; not a bird sang. The lake had faded off into vapour—but the island rose solidly out of the grey mist as if it were carved out of a single pearl.

This was the hour, when in the war firing-parties took out

THE SHUT DOOR

cowards and shot them. Twice Malcolm had been in command of one. An unpleasant job, because the cowards died like brave men, and you had the feeling that there mightn't be much difference.

Chloe would be expecting him. She would guess that he could not come at once, but she would never dream that he was hesitating whether to come at all. He had the key to the boat-house in his pocket. . . . She was seventeen. In twenty years' time he would be seventy-two and she would be thirty-seven. His wife wasn't the woman to stand a scandal. She would divorce him; and he would only see Peggy every now and then.

His future had looked empty before, but at least it had looked respectable and dignified. Madeleine had been a married woman, and married women are fair game; but this girl of seventeen was forbidden fruit.

What had he to give this child, five years older than his own Peggy?

His England didn't take divorce lightly. Every friend he had would think he had behaved abominably. He himself would think so, by and by. That was the kind of thing a code did to you—it struck back! But how could he bear to defraud Chloe of her dream? He was a god to her, and that was what was pulling him towards the lake, as if his soul were being dragged by ropes of iron. But how long would he seem a god to her—this eager, avid creature athirst for life? How soon would he be simply a wearisome old man? The door of her future would be locked again, and he would be the lock upon the door—no longer the hand that opened it. The island shone close to his feet, a bubble of pure gold. The sky was a faint azure. Was the night already over? Had time itself decided for him?

He could not go to her in daylight. He turned back to the hotel. The birds were making a horrible din in the garden—one was a nightingale.

He went back into the stale ugliness of the smoking room, and wrote:

'You are seventeen; and I am fifty-two. That is the reason why I am not coming to you. I shall not see you again, but I shall never get you out of my eyes, nor out of my heart.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Then he crossed out the last sentence. It was true; but it might haunt her. It was no use trying to haunt a girl who had the world before her.

He hunted about on the hillside and found a boy to take the note to Chloe. Then he went upstairs to his wife's room.

He was quite sure she was not asleep; but she had the sense to lie still with her eyes shut. When he had got into bed, his eyes mechanically sought the hole in the mosquito-netting; but Clara had had it mended.

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

Marthe loved the solid earth. There was something reassuring about its immovable surface. You could not fall off it, you could not upset it, you did not have to think of it at all, except for a brief fleeting moment, as you crossed the Place Pigalle.

Not that Marthe Girard feared her precarious balancing upon the air. She would not have been one of the finest girl acrobats in France if space had ever intimidated her.

Nor would she have been a permanent member of that very distinguished travelling circus kept by Père and Mère Martin.

Her father and grandfather had been acrobats before her, and you might say that Marthe began her training before she could walk, while lying in a clothes-basket watching her father practise on parallel bars. His shadowy antics, reflected on the white-washed wall, passed their flying secrets into her blood, and when Marthe was old enough to walk, her life was already set to this unconscious rhythm.

Marthe's mother had her own reasons for disliking life, and left it as soon as possible, so that Marthe was brought up in the circus among seals and clowns, ponies, and a dog that quite enjoyed being turned into a bull and pretending to gore an equally playful matador. Mère Martin easily incorporated an animal as plastic as a baby into her large, loose, unruly, neurotic family: where all day long everyone was trying to distinguish himself a little more than his neighbour, and life consisted of preparations for stunts—and quarrels after stunts.

What Marthe liked best was to curl up on the soft brown carpet, out of the way of the ponies, and watch the man who carried on his nose a table with glasses on its four corners. If she were very lucky, and the girl he practised with grew bored, Marthe might even be allowed to hand the glasses to him one

by one, and finally the flower vase for the middle of the table.

Then there was the bicycle man; Marthe could never take her eyes off him when he dashed over the smooth surface of the ring, riding one bicycle and balancing another on the front wheel, or riding the back wheel with the front one pawing the air. It was a miracle what he did with this old-fashioned machine, almost at its last gasp. He turned it into a flying carpet, or into a flash of lightning. It appeared to have the softness of melted butter, while it retained the rigour of plain steel.

When Marthe was very young, she thought it was the bicycle which was responsible for these triumphs over matter, but when she was old enough to catch the bicycle alone and fall off it, she learned that there was no magic in the machine itself. It was all in the bicycle man's harsh, brave, bitter vanity.

But Marthe did not know, for quite a long time, any more about vanity than she did about bicycles. All life was a series of miracles to her, and whether they happened because you put your last ounce into them, or as effortlessly as the great white circus horse swished his long tail, was equally a mystery.

When she was four years old her father began to make her practise on the horizontal bar. Marthe had to work till her short arms ached all over and the nerves down her spine felt like hot wires. But when at last her father patted her on the head and said, '*Assez donc*, small, good cat!' she felt sufficiently rewarded.

There were only three women in the circus; and one of them was Mère Martin. But you could hardly call Mère Martin a woman. She was a great natural force, keeping all the performers in their places, and entering like iron into the system of Père Martin when it needed support. The other two ladies were mediocre, both in themselves and in their performances.

There was the lady in white satin and long white leather boots, who rode the wisest horse in the world and tried to pretend she was the source of his wisdom. But Père Martin used to say: 'Women who will wear white satin and ride astride a cushion can be picked up on any avenue, but a horse that can dance, mind his tubs, and wave a forefoot at the audience—well, that

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

one is a gift of God, and needs twenty years' training into the bargain!

The third lady was more mediocre still, and very low-spirited. She had to keep herself up on gin, because she had no stunt of her own to do, and only wore silver spangles and held out a hand to the bicycle man once or twice during his performance. Then she had to change into something simpler still, and wait on the man who carried a table on his nose.

'It is a dog's life,' she said bitterly to Marthe, 'and if I were not paid to keep those men up, I should most certainly let them down. They depend on me—but who believes it? I should like them to try to get through their parts without me! Then perhaps the audience would see at last which is the beef and which the brandy!'

Later on Marthe had to go to school, but not for long. Such things can be arranged by great natural forces like Mère Martin, and soon Marthe was back again at the circus, spending more and more of her time learning to balance and to turn her slim, neat body into hard elastic.

When she was seven years old she was put on the wires for the first time.

'A wire', her father told her, 'is as safe as a staircase; it is the way you look at it—*vois-tu*? It won't break, it can't come undone, and it holds you off the air! Well, then, why fall off it? There is nothing wrong with your toes, is there? Nor with your ankles? Nor with the joints of your legs? No! I thought not! And what is wrong inside your head then—I ask myself? You say, "What should there be inside my head then, Papa?" *Mon enfant*, I beg you will listen to me this one time—nothing! Nothing at all should be inside your head—except audacity!'

Mère Martin overheard all this, but she insisted nevertheless upon the nets.

'The child is a child!' she explained to Père Martin; 'if she looks off the wires, what happens? One breaks one's neck only once!'

'Ah, but she won't look off the wires—that one!' grumbled Père Martin.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Still, he kept the nets up, till one day Marthe's father said to him very seriously, 'You will ruin her nerve, mon père! You know as well as I do that there should never be a way to save oneself—except by oneself!'

Père Martin agreed; and while Mère Martin was busy cooking something especially succulent, which absorbed her entire vigilance, he took away the nets and Marthe found herself alone upon the air.

It was from that moment that she began to love the solid earth; but she never told anybody of this rather disgraceful passion.

When she was fourteen, Marthe began to perform with her father.

She learned a little more about vanity then, but not much, because what she did seemed to be chiefly her father's doing.

When Marthe flung her trapeze away from her and launched herself across space to meet his trapeze swinging towards her, she knew that it would never swing wide. Every drop of blood in her father's body was for her. He did not praise her. He did not scold her. He asked no more of her than she could give. But he was always first on his trapeze, always ready with his steady, impeccable counting, so that she had only to act when the right number came. At the moment when she needed just that grip, that push, that almost invisible point of contact which meant safety, it was always there.

As she grew older, he made Marthe count for herself. The trapeze he swung from was no longer so near hers. He faced her now across a naked gulf of air.

But all Marthe had to do was to count quite steadily, and then her legs, her arms, and her elastic body would move competently at the number she had taught them to obey. Her father was doing his own job, but Marthe felt that he was doing hers too—his mind was still behind her own. When the performance ended, he would give the final signal. The rope ladder would be within her reach, and down she came, while the whole sea of faces and a great roar of sound greeted her from below.

Marthe knew that those faces must never matter until she was down. She must not listen to the applause until she stood

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

on the brown carpet, hot and smiling; then she could bow and kiss her hand, and take all they gave her of their rapture.

But to Marthe none of the applause was as satisfactory as the feel of that brown solid carpet under her feet.

The nets were put up for the performances, but they were not there for Marthe. They were only there to make the audience feel more comfortable.

'I knew a man once', her father told her, 'who fell into the nets and strangled himself, but I never knew a man fall when there was no net!'

One cold January day, when Marthe was sixteen years old, her father caught a severe chill, and after a few days struggling to keep erect upon an invisible wire, he was taken to a hospital; and Marthe lost him.

She was allowed to see him once, before he died, and between his flying breaths he gasped out at her: 'Nothing can happen to you—if you are not afraid—unless you want it to!'

And then something happened to him. But as Marthe knew that he was never afraid, she had to suppose that it was what he wanted to have happen. He was forty, and after forty there is not much life left for an acrobat.

For a long time Marthe could not face the trapeze.

Père Martin had to employ two strangers for the trapeze whom no-one liked.

But he paid Marthe just the same, for she spent all day long in the circus, helping Mère Martin keep things going, feeding the animals, cooking, mending, soothing quarrels, and running errands like a flying Mercury.

'All this is very well,' said Mère Martin one day, 'but the little one has her vocation—something must be done about it!'

They were at Marseille for the moment. Père Martin scratched his head and growled; then he went out into the Cannebière, where there is always anything to be found from Algerian tumblers to pink and white English middies; and where men of almost every profession, including murderers and even a saint or two, are all standing about ready to pick up a job.

Père Martin came back at déjeuner with a smooth-cheeked young man as supple as a cat.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'Marthe,' he said, 'this is Jacques Baillet; he is your *paire*! It is time that you practised with him, for on Sunday you must go up again!'

Marthe, who was in the act of pouring out an enormous Algerian mess for the tumblers, looked across the table at the young man, and burned her fingers from the heat of the dish. Jacques was not very tall, but she saw at a glance that he had the sinewy straight back and limbs of a finished acrobat.

The eyes which looked into her own flickered a little nervously.

Marthe liked steady eyes best. Her father had had clear blue eyes, like a windless sky, eyes which had meant exactly what they said.

These soft, flickering eyes were secret and unstable; they did not seem eyes which would catch you, without doubt, in the air.

Still Jacques was a very fine acrobat, very famous, and a popular favourite.

Fortunately Marthe had not lost much ground in these last six months, for she had never failed morning and evening to practise at home on the bars. She well knew what it meant to lose the mechanical skill of her trained muscles. Not for all the strange weight of her heart, when she thought of the trapeze without her father, could she do such a *bêtise* as to miss her practice!

Jacques had a grand new stunt to teach Marthe, something easier, he explained, and at the same time more important, than anything she had ever done. There was to be a ladder pivoting on a steel bar. Marthe was to stand in the middle of this ladder and keep it steady, while Jacques was to swing on a trapeze suspended from it. He was to hang first by his hands, then by one hand only, and finally by his teeth, from a gag which he would adjust while swinging, and meanwhile Marthe was to hold the ladder exactly balanced and to count for him.

Then he would climb back again upon his ladder, slip through its rungs on his side, while she slipped through the rungs on her side, and both of them would whirl around like comets, safe and snug inside their respective rungs.

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

'You see it will be all quite simple,' Jacques explained pleasantly. 'With counting—and balance—and a little practice, it is as easy as preparing a good dinner!' and he smiled a fascinating, fleeting smile at Mère Martin, who looked at him rather coldly over her soup-plate and said drily: 'So you think that easy to do, do you, young man? Then all I can say is, I should not care to cook dinners for you!'

As soon as Mère Martin's large family had finished eating and began to quarrel over their cigarettes, Jacques took Marthe into the circus and showed her the swinging ladder.

Marthe became excited as she listened to the explanation of how to balance on that long slender see-saw, so that she could hold Jacques as safe as the heart in her body.

By-and-by she ran off to put on her skin tights and short tulle skirt with spangles, and Jacques taught her to allow for his weight on the swing and for the alterations due to each of his movements. They spent all day long practising, with short intervals to clear their eyes and rest their aching muscles.

When the ring was needed for the performances, they went to Marthe's attic and practised there.

By Sunday it was possible for Marthe to perform, but it was a hard stunt, and would always call for the whole of her strength, nerve and judgement. These qualities were not those she had had to think about while her father lived. They seemed to come out of him and to enter into Marthe without any effort on her part.

But now it was something of her own which this young man asked of her. Nor did he give Marthe anything in exchange.

In this stunt things might happen which Marthe could not count on. However careful Jacques was, and however clever, he might have to use more weight one time than another. He might move a trifle slower, or take a fraction longer adjusting his gag, or he might find himself having to risk a quicker return onto his ladder. Marthe must allow for all these fractions of weight and time. It was upon her suppleness of wit and muscle that they both depended. The whole stunt hung by a hair. If Marthe's weight was thrown too far forward, Jacques would never get back. If it was not thrown forward enough, the ladder would tip over, and Marthe must go with it.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Of course, when they were practising on the low trapeze, they could fall as much as they liked. Those kindly little tumbles on the soft brown carpet were in themselves a reassurance. They were the mistakes which taught them to be daring without penalties. But once they were well up in the air, there must be no more mistakes. Then everything must go by heart—punctually, like a good clock.

Marthe sometimes wondered if Père Martin knew how hard the new stunt was, but she did not like to ask him. Jacques knew, but when you have to hang by your teeth from a small gag, you are not very sympathetic to the fears of others, placed in comparative safety, on their feet. Nor had Jacques a very sympathetic nature. He used to speak very sharply to Marthe while they were practising.

One day he followed her out into the Cannebière. Marthe thought by the scowl on his face that he was going to scold her again, and her heart sank, for when Jacques spoke to her with anger in his voice, she felt as if there was not even a net beneath her.

But this time he did not scold her, he took her by the shoulder at the corner of the big café and said between his teeth, almost as if he didn't like saying it,

'Marthe—*je t'aime!*'

Well, of course Marthe knew what that meant! One does not live to be seventeen in a travelling circus and have any doubts left about a little thing like love.

Marthe looked deep into Jacques' flickering eyes before she answered him. They were disturbed and angry—hot and, as it were, hungry.

She stood with her weight first on one foot and then on the other, while his steely fingers pressed into her shoulders; waiting till she knew what Jacques' eyes meant. '*Alors!*' she said at last, and laughed. Because girls in the quarter always said '*Alors!*' and laughed when young men said '*Je t'aime!*'

'I go back with thee, then, tonight—to thy room,' Jacques persisted almost morosely; 'and I stay there—it is understood!'

Marthe looked a little graver then, for this was, she saw, a

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

serious offer. Jacques meant not only to become, but to remain, her lover.

This had not happened to Marthe before. She might easily have had a lover, but, for one reason or another, she had lived alone.

If she said 'No' to Jacques, how could they do their difficult stunt together? There must not be anything in their minds that could hurt one another, once they were on the trapeze.

Besides, Marthe felt she would be ashamed to refuse so little a thing as love to such a good acrobat.

Jacques might suppose, too, that she was innocent and knew nothing about life, and when one is seventeen how can one bear to be supposed innocent? So after a long pause, she said, '*Tiens!* I am going to buy my supper now.' And Jacques replied: 'Well, then, I go with thee!'

They bought a magnificent supper: a cheese, a salad, radishes, eggs, cream cakes and oranges; and carrying a quantity of paper parcels and a bottle of wine, they climbed the innumerable stairs which led to Marthe's temporary home.

The lights of Marseille flashed beneath them like the eyes of friendly animals in the velvet dusk, and in the studio itself the geranium plants upon the window-sill smelt hot and sweet—as if they still held sunshine.

They ate and drank and laughed and slept, and went back to the circus in the morning.

After that everything went much easier. Somehow or other Marthe always knew now just what Jacques was going to do next. It came into her mind without effort. Life became like the rhythmic dance she used to watch on the walls when she was a baby.

But Jacques did not seem any different from usual. Often he was just as cross, and in his eyes there lurked that curious look—almost like a grudge—which Marthe had never fathomed.

Père Martin was pleased with them both and increased their salaries. They got more applause than anyone else in the circus except the greatest clown in the world, who came to them once on a visit.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

One day this great genius deigned to speak to Marthe. He said, 'I'd like to see a bird which could teach you anything!'

Jacques was angry when someone repeated to him what the great clown had said to Marthe, for to Jacques he had said nothing. And yet Jacques hung by his teeth from a gag and was the only man in France, perhaps in the world, who could do his particular stunt.

The next day Jacques came to Marthe and said: 'Marthe, there will not be nets any more at the performances. I have told Père Martin. Such things are old-fashioned. The audience gets no kick out of it. They naturally wish to feel one is in danger. Till I came here I never saw a net used except for practice. If there is a net, why am I any better than any young man walking up the Métro stairs?'

Marthe suddenly felt sick and shivered, but she agreed, of course. She couldn't make Jacques feel no better than a young man walking up the Métro stairs.

Mère Martin was very cross when she heard the nets were to go. 'It is all a young man's fancy,' she said to Marthe. 'You need not consent to it unless you choose. Père Martin will stand by you.'

But Marthe had already chosen, for you cannot accept a man in your heart and not accept the lightest of his fancies.

There was a performance every day and two on Sundays, Thursdays, and Saturdays; the next week they were to leave Marseille.

Marthe rubbed the powdered resin into the soles of her supple shoes more carefully than ever now, and took a deeper breath than usual before she ran up the rope staircase. She balanced for a moment longer, very slim and straight on her swinging ladder, before she crouched to steady Jacques, as he passed her on his way to his trapeze.

Even Jacques moved a little more slowly now, doing first one thing and then another of his fearful changes with delicate, deliberate smoothness, while their lives hung on Marthe's steady counting; and beneath them both was nothing but the air.

Marthe loved the earth more than ever when she got safely down.

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

But there was something that she loved better than the earth—better even than safety.

When Jacques held her fast in his fierce embrace, she gave herself to him till there was nothing more to give.

But about this love, too, Marthe said nothing. There were nights when Jacques did not come back to the studio; but this did not make Marthe less his, it only made Jacques less hers.

One day, while Marthe was in the stall of the smallest and most spoilt of the ponies, hardly larger than a dog, whom she had petted and cared for ever since his first arrival, she heard two men's voices. They must, she thought, be leaning with their backs to the stall, and one of them was Jacques and the other was the bicycle man.

'I cannot think', Adolphe, the bicycle man, was saying, 'how you stand it—always that girl with you, sharing your applause, never to know which of you is being praised! You, for all you do—and anyone should see that the brain is yours—or she for that silly simple balancing! Also I assure you for that a stout woman would be much safer. Marthe is too slim. Pah! I would never perform with a double. Everyone knows my girl is a nothing. I take my applause alone.'

'It is that piece of tulle round her waist,' agreed Jacques savagely. 'They think a girl so much cleverer than a man, just because she *is* a girl. If she could do my stunt—one laughs at the thought! Yet I, with one hand tied behind me, *I* could do hers!'

'It would be a mere bagatelle to you,' replied Adolphe sympathetically. 'But who is to know that?' Grock did not know it, when he said to Marthe, "I should like to see a bird teach you anything!" But people think too much of Grock, I have always said so! We could do all that he does, if we had happened to think of it first!'

Jacques cursed; then, when he had stopped cursing, he said in the same tone of voice: 'She is too stupid, that little one! Figure to yourself! I had to make her my mistress before I could do anything with her at all. It was an inconvenience to me, for I already had a very fine one, and I have never liked women much either.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'I', said the bicycle man, 'do not like them at all.' And he proceeded at some length to explain why not, and what it was he liked instead.

But Marthe heard nothing of the bicycle man's proclivities, for her head was buried deep in Bobby's neck where his mane was thickest.

Bobby bore it for as long as he could, then he flung his little head up and pawed the earth impatiently, for he did not like a shivering lump of girl holding on to him, any more than anybody else liked it.

By-and-by the two men strolled away from the side of Bobby's stall, and Père Martin called, 'Marthe! Marthe! Where the devil is the girl gone? It's time she went up!'

Marthe came out of Bobby's stall then and hurried to her dressing-room. She put on her skin pink tights and the little piece of tulle round her slim waist. Her fingers were a little clumsy fastening it, but she did not forget to rub her thin white leather shoes with the powdered resin as carefully as usual.

It was Sunday and the circus was brimful—not so much as a chair vacant.

Marthe ran out into the ring without glancing at the kindly wall of eyes. They were the Public. They were there; they paid, but they did not matter.

The swinging rope ladder in front of her was her business.

Without looking for Jacques, she saw him; his beautiful slim boy's figure, rippling with supple strength, ran by her side.

Strange that this figure which had held her so close that she had not felt the separate beating of her heart was no longer hers! She was an inconvenience to him, a threat to his burning vanity. That was what the grudge in his eyes had meant.

Marthe slipped up the ladder with her usual careful speed, but she had forgotten to take those long deep breaths her father had told her always to take before she mounted. Her heart pounded heavily against her side. For a moment, as she stood erect on the swaying ladder, a little cloud veiled her eyes. It was as if the air heaved round her. But the cloud was gone in a second and she began to count.

A LITTLE PIECE OF TULLE

Jacques slipped past her as usual, and as usual she knew, by the pull upon her thighs and back, that he was safely seated in his swing.

It moved to and fro very gently over the empty air.

Jacques always swung for a moment or two first, to relax his nerves before he began his stunts.

Now he was standing up. One hand was off the ropes, and his whole body floated out, suspended from the swing; only her careful balancing made his return possible.

Marthe counted slowly and steadily. Nothing else, nothing else must be in her head but that steady counting! In ten seconds now he would be safe upon the ladder. In ten more—— What was it the bicycle man had said about the applause: 'My girl is a nothing!' Ah! but she mustn't think! 'Five! six! seven!'

She braced every muscle in her body for the final effort. Jacques was hanging from the gag by his teeth. She must hold him smoothly now, without a jerk, without a pause. 'Eight—nine—ten!' Again that little deadly cloud wavered before her eyes. Through it she saw Jacques—or was it that she only felt him?—standing on his swing again. Mounting—mounting? She had never felt her body ache like this before; something tore with a sharp pain in her side. No! This was really Jacques pouring himself through the rungs of his ladder, like cream—his hand was within reach of the rope ladder. He was safe now, whatever happened.

Marthe could not keep her mind clear any more. It filled suddenly with strange thoughts. She saw Jacques turn his head, she thought he screamed something at her. Her hands fumbled at the rungs of the ladder, her foot slipped, but nothing had happened yet. There was a long, frozen pause, while through her mind thoughts galloped like horses round and round a ring. She saw Bobby in his stall. She saw millions of faces upside-down, waiting for her; she heard her father saying, 'Nothing can happen to you—if you are not afraid!—unless you want it to!'

This, then, was Fear—this black blind pit into which she presently plunged? Her solid body sank into a choking rush. She did not know it was the earth which struck her.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

It was not Jacques' fault, no-one condemned him. The Algerian tumblers, waiting to come on, saw how it had happened.

Marthe had got him up safe, then her foot had slipped! She was almost within the rungs of the ladder, but her nerve had gone. She had clutched at the wires. Well, there it was—the moment you start clutching—you are done for!

It was a shocking thing, and of course it meant putting up the nets again for the rest of the season.

Still it didn't seem quite fair for old Père Martin to sack Jacques Baillet directly afterwards, just because the bicycle man had said that Jacques wanted it to happen! Adolphe would say anything, everyone knew, to get a man into trouble who got more applause than he did.

But it was Mère Martin who was really responsible for Jacques' dismissal. It was she who said to Père Martin, looking down at the little crumpled figure in its pink tulle and spangles, 'That Jacques goes!' Père Martin had expostulated. 'But, my pigeon,' he said, 'he did nothing to make the child fall! He had every right to be safe!'

'He had his rights, that one,' Mère Martin replied grimly, 'while Marthe lived—no doubt but that he had his rights! And now that she is dead—the little one shall have hers!'

THE VISITATION

Kathleen Morrison knew quite well that she ought to say 'No!'

This kind, dazzling child was offering her a day's pleasure, under the impression that she was asking a favour of a good older woman of her own world, merely more deeply—perhaps more favourably—experienced than herself.

Kathleen Morrison had been acquitted, a month ago, of murdering her best friend, although she had in fact murdered her; and it struck her that she was hardly the kind of companion for a nice young girl.

Nobody in the pension had recognized Kathleen under her new name. Fortunately, however good photographs are nowadays, newspapers managed to turn likenesses into libels.

Kathleen might have been invisible, sitting there wrecked on the sunny Florentine terrace, while kindly middle-aged fellow-countrywomen loomed up before her now and then with their discreet unintimate hotel chatter; and faded off like figures seen through a fog.

But this girl, with her golden head and the features of a questing Diana, was not possible to overlook; and Kathleen had not failed to observe her going about with a young Italian as handsome as herself.

A faintly sardonic smile curved Kathleen's pale lips: 'It's very kind of you', she said, 'to suggest that we should have a day's motoring together, but you don't know very much about me, do you?'

Beatrice Madden laughed, a subdued schoolboy chuckle: 'Do I need to know anything about you,' she demanded, 'in order to take you out for a drive in my car?'

'That's true,' Kathleen admitted slowly, 'especially—though I've done some driving in my time—if I keep my hands off the wheel. You drive very well, I've noticed. Well, I'll come.'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

The girl was pleased, but she didn't say so. She was a clean, fierce creature, inarticulate and simple as a boy. She only nodded her beautiful daffodil head, without meeting Kathleen's smiling, faintly mocking eyes, and strolled off through the ilex hedge.

It was curious, Kathleen felt, that she could still please anybody. She had looked upon herself as rather conveniently dead; and the dead, though you can forget them or else remember them with pain, seldom arouse pleasure.

'I shan't do her any harm,' Kathleen thought defensively. 'I'm going away the day after tomorrow. It's better not to stay too long in any one place, and I don't want to take a fancy to this girl—that would be too silly of me! Funny—when she turned away just now, without letting me see her eyes because they were pleased—how she reminded me of Peter!'

There she was, off again, like a squirrel in a cage, going round and round, trying to escape—or was it to recapture that perpetual presence? And how completely, fatuously useless all such attempts at escape or recapture were!

She'd got off being hanged because that was a thing somebody else did to you. It was always on the cards you could escape somebody else, but you couldn't escape yourself.

It had been rather a relief to be accused of technically murdering Anne, because, after all, Kathleen hadn't administered material poison; but when she had been—after those interminable, searing weeks—finally acquitted, Anne's death stood opposite her eyes as the only logical issue of her theft.

Probably Peter was right never to have anything more to do with her. His silence didn't mean that he doubted what was called Kathleen's 'innocence'. Peter knew just how innocent Kathleen was, and just how guilty. If she had been condemned to be hanged, he would have come to see her quickly enough.

It was a little stupid of Peter, perhaps (though Peter was not usually stupid), not to understand that to be condemned to the perpetual darkness of his silence was rather worse than being hanged.

Kathleen's inner eyes, so hopelessly fixed upon Peter's retreating image, had grown blind. She could, she said to herself,

THE VISITATION

sitting there in the deep hot sunshine (which her sympathetic counsel had so strongly recommended for her nerves), begin to misjudge Peter soon. Up till now she had not been able to misjudge him. He was still all the things that she had loved him for; and Peter had hated theft. Kathleen, too, disliked theft, but unfortunately not so much as she had liked Peter. Both he and Anne had been, from the first, so hopelessly honest and kind. They'd been sorry for Kathleen, married to a rake and deserted at twenty-one—not even divorced, just left with her treacherous charm, or whatever men thought it was, and three hundred a year. Peter and Anne had given her the shelter of their happy home. They had thought it safe to ask her, over and over again, for months at a time, to stay with them and share their settled happiness.

Kathleen, too, had thought it safe at first. She could not quite remember when she had begun to recognize in Peter not only all the things she herself had missed (she could have stood that test, for she was used to missing things), but all that he was missing himself. Because Anne, good as gold though she was, hadn't Kathleen's particular gifts to share with him.

Peter, of course, had behaved perfectly. Kathleen couldn't, looking back, see a single loose joint in that proud armour of Peter's honour. He'd neither said nor done, nor even looked, one thing that Anne's husband shouldn't. His loyalty was intact; and yet the thing—the accursed thing—had happened. Kathleen had stolen Peter's heart.

For a long time she hadn't believed it. It seemed to her that loving Peter was her own private business—a nice, quiet, unpretentious dream. You loved him—and you left him alone. You treated him as a friend, of course, but, except for having your heart dragged out of your body whenever you looked at him, you got on very nicely; and Peter apparently got on very nicely too.

The person who didn't get on quite so nicely was Anne. She had found it simpler to take—from a doctor's dispensary (a dear muddle-headed old man in the village whom she had known all her life)—enough opium to cause death.

Anne had then killed herself, very efficaciously and neatly,

while Peter was abroad on business and Kathleen was staying alone with her at the cottage.

Anne was too nice to have imagined that people would think Kathleen had murdered her; she simply thought it rather stupid and hurting to leave notes and explanations behind.

There was no evidence either way. Anne might have taken the opium herself, or it might have been given her by Kathleen.

There had had to be an inquest, and Kathleen had been sent up for trial. The case had hung upon which of the two women had taken the opium from old Dr. Munt's dispensary. They had had equal chances to take it, and neither of them had been seen going in or going out. The opium had been missed, but not until Anne had accomplished her purpose.

Up to the last moment Anne had been perfectly sweet; perfectly sweet to Kathleen and perfectly sweet to Peter. There was no evidence that she had been unhappy in her married life; she had confided in no-one. She had merely grown rather thin. It was true she had given Peter away to Kathleen, but nobody knew that except Kathleen. Anne had said to her once: 'Peter likes you better than me now, but don't let's bother him about it.'

Anne had apparently not realized that his wife's self-inflicted death would be rather a bother to Peter; and it was the worst of Kathleen's trouble that she never knew quite how much Peter had been bothered. In order to explain his ruthless silence, it sometimes occurred to Kathleen that Peter had been bothered very much.

After the trial was over, Kathleen had left England under an assumed name, very worn-out and tidy, very quiet and plain.

She had been able to sit all day long on the terrace of the Villa Adorato, and not one of its small, expensive clientèle had guessed: 'That is the murderess, Kathleen Morrison!' Because, of course, although Kathleen had been acquitted, nobody except Peter believed her even technically innocent.

A beautifully toned gong sounded on the terrace, and Kathleen knew that it was lunch-time, and that at her little separate table in the cool dark salon she would be given the opportunity of eating a remarkably good lunch.

THE VISITATION

After lunch was over, Beatrice Madden wandered across the room to Kathleen and said: 'D'you mind if I bring a man tomorrow? He hasn't seen Prato or Pistoia. He's a kind of artist—a sculptor; he's Italian, and his name is Giuseppe Airolò. He doesn't like old things generally, but it seems at Pistoia there's a statue by Lucca della Robbia which is rather good. He won't bother us. He'll sit in the back of the car. Shall we start about nine? It's better avoiding the heat, and we can rest in one of those open-air restaurants, and come back when it's cool. Would that suit you? And you're sure you don't mind about my bringing the man?'

'It would suit me perfectly,' Kathleen said; 'of course bring your friend. I think I've heard his name before. His work is very clever, isn't it? I should like to meet him.'

'It is awfully clever!' the girl said eagerly. 'I'd like you to see it.' She turned her profile to Kathleen and looked past her out of the window.

The garden, shimmering in the heat, was almost too bright to look at. Its trellises were loaded with roses—yellow, white, and pink—and beneath them purple iris, fathomlessly dark, stood against the ilex hedge in stately rows.

'He's married,' the girl said very quietly. 'His wife's terribly nice. But she doesn't care much about motoring, so she won't come with us tomorrow.'

Kathleen knew exactly what the girl was feeling. She turned her eyes away from the fine stern profile. It wasn't fair to look at it.

'There is rather a beautiful Donatello pulpit at Prato,' Kathleen said quickly, but not too quickly. 'I saw it years ago, and I've always wanted to look at it again. I've never been to Pistoia. Those Renaissance things are great fun, aren't they? We have a different way of seeing things now, of course; but when they were discovering that particular way, they quite brought it off. Of course their spontaneity has been spoilt for us by people copying it to death. Curiosity is the only thing that really carries through time, isn't it? The creative curiosity, I mean, which fights its way into expression?'

The girl's stern profile relaxed. 'I don't know much about

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

art,' she confessed, 'but I like his stuff—Giuseppe's things, I mean! He says the same as you do, that one's got to find out for oneself.'

Kathleen waited, but the girl had nothing more to say about Giuseppe or about finding out things for oneself, so Kathleen said, before the pause had prolonged itself into discomfort: 'I'm going to my room with a book. That's a polite way of saying I want to take a nap, isn't it? You, I suppose, never take one in the daytime?'

Beatrice agreed that she didn't. She was just going down to Florence in her car. Had Mrs. Berrington any commissions?

Mrs. Berrington shook her head. She couldn't very well ask this lovely girl to register the last part of the enormous fee she must pay to the famous counsel who had got her off being hanged.

Beatrice strode out, hatless, through the French window onto the blazing terrace. She wasn't afraid of the sun, or of being hanged—or of being left alone.

The next day was exactly what an Italian spring day should be. Everything looked as if it were growing under a pearl—shining and a little pale. Florence rose slowly out of a milky mist. The hills were a delphinium blue. Olive trees floated about the landscape like balls of silvery smoke.

Beatrice's Bugatti, a black rakish car, ran as though it were poured over the long white roads.

A delicious feeling of escape seized Kathleen. She hadn't been able to believe that anything could be, in itself, pleasant again. If a thing was beautiful, it had made her think of Peter; if it were ugly, of herself; and if she saw anything that was hurt, it had instantly reminded her of Anne. Now, for the first time, she saw slim tall trees empty of foliage, except for their feathery green crowns, and felt possessed by their separate loveliness. Their golden leaves moved like seaweed, softly blown to and fro in the blue air. The early morning breeze, unsoiled and new, tasted sweet.

Giuseppe sat behind them. He had most bright and honest eyes, and it was impossible not to see that his heart was sea-deep in love with Beatrice.

THE VISITATION

All that Kathleen could tell about the girl beside her was that she was very quiet. But she knew instinctively that they were both happy, with the same ecstatic, innocent happiness. There were such moments, Kathleen remembered, when desire was at peace and all the world flowered gently in one's grateful heart.

Still, they couldn't go on forgetting for long what that wife—that terribly nice wife—was feeling like at home.

Beatrice drove beautifully. She treated the unknown with respect, traffic with consideration, and an open road she took like a bird. The Bugatti responded to her every touch. It preferred running at a hundred and ten kilometres, but patiently drew up within its length for the merest shadow of a dog.

Kathleen soon stopped thinking of Beatrice's driving. She stopped thinking at all, and let the earth melt past her, a mass of snowy blossom and faintly glittering leaves.

They talked very little, but all three of them felt each other's friendliness. They chose a place for lunch at Prato, near Donatello's open-air pulpit. The pulpit was a magnificent work of tossed limbs and light hearts. The last thing it reminded one of was sermons.

Giuseppe said you could do bodies better than that nowadays, but you very seldom got so much kick into them. Donatello was a great fellow for kick. Even today it made your toes wriggle to look at him.

Giuseppe ordered lunch, in a long and thrilling operatic duet with an enchanted waiter.

The lunch began with very small, very young artichokes; veal cutlets followed, with a salad of raw and delicate beans. Then cheese and ripe figs. They drank Asti spumanti.

Giuseppe and Kathleen did all the talking. Kathleen had seldom enjoyed a talk more, for to talk with Giuseppe was to watch eloquence at its source. His was no shapeless, tiresome emotion which could not control itself, but emotion soaked in intellectual ardour presenting itself with the clear directness of a flame. Giuseppe's eyes, hands, words, sprang out into the air with the light rhythmic ease of Donatello's cupids.

What they talked about was freedom. Donatello came into it, and so did the whole of Giuseppe's burning heart.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Giuseppe presented magnificent arguments for human beings doing what they liked. Kathleen felt, as she had often felt before, that reasons for doing what you wanted were always stronger and easier to follow than reasons for not doing it. Perhaps that was why Peter had always refused to discuss the subject. Kathleen knew that, though Giuseppe talked to her, every word of his rapid, eager, impassioned speech was really addressed to the silent girl by her side. Kathleen had often talked like that to other people in Peter's presence, and Peter had been just as silent as the girl.

For the sake of good talk, and perhaps of something which, without giving a name to it, Kathleen recognized as fair play, she took the opposite side of Giuseppe's argument. She quoted an old Indian proverb: 'You cannot choose freedom and go in bondage to the delight of life.' She even tried to prove that the delight of life is a bondage.

But the storm of Giuseppe's eloquence brushed away her slender barriers of restraint.

Everything was on Giuseppe's side—the golden day, the sparkling wine, the light in Beatrice's eyes, their young and splendid love.

Modern poets, Kathleen thought to herself, belittle love, but modern lovers do not belittle it; they know that it creates a new Heaven and a new Earth, exactly as it did for Cleopatra and Mark Antony. Even Peter would not have denied this; he would merely have refrained from asserting it.

Giuseppe's eloquence was light as air; but there was in it the hard core of desire.

Suddenly his light brown eyes left Kathleen's face and turned accusingly upon the girl.

'You', he said, with the frank brutality of passion, 'are perfectly free! I never knew anyone more free! You have no parents, no obligations. You have wealth, you can do what you like. Why do you not, then, do it?'

There was a long, electric silence. Beatrice did not look at him; she turned her beautiful blind face towards Kathleen.

'That is true,' she said slowly, her lips twisting as if they were in pain, 'I can do what I like. But how am I to know what is to come of it?'

THE VISITATION

Up to that moment Kathleen had not been sure whose side she was on. She had hardly been sure that there were different sides. But she knew now. She bared her eyes to the girl and let her look straight into her own tortured soul. Aloud she said nothing, but her eyes said: 'You see before you one of the victims of Freedom. I murdered my best friend, I lost my lover. These are the things which happen when one does what one likes!'

Giuseppe began again, more eloquently than ever, but neither of them listened to him. The air grew slumberous and hot. Kathleen suddenly felt that she could stand no more. Let them fight it out for themselves somewhere else, and stop using her lost heart, for their battlefield.

'I am going to take a room and rest,' she said decisively. 'You two go and look at the town. There are plenty of things to see in it, and you can buy picture postcards. I've seen the place before, and I've bought all the picture postcards I shall ever want. Come back for me at four o'clock, and we'll go on to Pistoia to see the della Robbia.'

Giuseppe looked at her gratefully. Beatrice rose slowly to her feet, without looking at either of them, and walked away with an air of sublime indifference. Peter would have walked off with Kathleen like that—if he'd been made to!

Kathleen felt sorry for Giuseppe, for Peter had not been at all affectionate when he was being forced to do what he liked.

They came back punctually at four o'clock. Beatrice exerted herself into being quite amusing about what they had seen in the town. Giuseppe did not exert himself at all. He ordered coffee sulkily and drank it in complete silence.

As soon as they had finished their coffee, they got into the car and skimmed off.

When they reached the church, Giuseppe sprang down and had the door open almost before they had stopped. His eyes entreated pardon, and Kathleen could not have forgiven Beatrice had she not seen the girl's eyes pardon him.

Kathleen went on a little ahead of the other two into the cool darkness of the nave. The long, uneven ripples of the pavement, worn by centuries of passing feet, made the church feel invisibly

inhabited—otherwise it was empty. In front of a side altar on the right was the Visitation of Lucca della Robbia.

The burden of their womanhood was on both Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth knew all that there was to be known. She was nearly worn out, and her courage had begun to fail. She held out her arms towards the girl. Her eyes, bent deeply on Mary, were stern with their shared pain. It was Mary who supported her. Mary guessed what she had to face, but her untried courage was enough for two. She looked straight into the eyes of Elizabeth with a dauntless strength.

Kathleen put her hand up to her throat—but fortunately she had not made a sound. She heard their footsteps behind her, and knelt down quickly in front of the altar. They would think that she was praying, and would leave her alone.

They stood behind her in silence; then she heard Giuseppe murmuring something rapidly. Beatrice answered him. She said three words.

Kathleen did not hear what they were, but she heard Giuseppe's hastily retreating footsteps down the long echoing nave.

Beatrice knelt down beside her. There was a long silence.

Kathleen was the first to rise from her knees. She felt a little dizzy, and was glad when Beatrice's hand shot out to steady her.

'One gets stiff', she whispered, 'kneeling—on those cold stones.'

Beatrice said nothing, but she kept her hand on Kathleen's arm while they walked down the church together.

Outside they found Giuseppe waiting for them. He had quite recovered his good spirits.

'That group', he said, 'is very well in its way! It was worth seeing! Perhaps one underestimates della Robbia—because of all those nursery plaques. He got hold of something this time, between those two women! Don't you think so?'

Beatrice made a faint sound, a sound not unlike the way Peter laughed when he was amused by something which was not wholly amusing.

Kathleen, whose self-control had come back to her, said everything that was at all necessary to say. As far as she could remember afterward she went on talking all the way home.

THE VISITATION

The next day Kathleen was told that the young Englishwoman had driven off, all alone, in her swift-running Bugatti. Her poor young Italian friend was inconsolable. 'These modern girls are so heartless!' one of the kind middle-aged ladies explained to Kathleen. 'Would you believe it, although they had been such friends, she left without even saying "Good-bye!"'

'There are two fairly sure ways of killing or of being killed,' Kathleen found herself saying into the astonished face of the English spinster. 'The knife or strangling. Strangling is slower. I am not surprised that the young should prefer the knife.'

A GAME OF SKILL

Sybil Dysart's head was beautifully shaped, her shell-like ears were set with exquisite neatness above the delicate long line of her throat. She had the small rounded figure of the Medicean Venus and danced like a flying faun. The shadow of her dead mother's beauty hovered over her face.

Still no girl with a beaky nose, small green eyes, and a poorish skin can be considered handsome.

Sybil had done the best she could with her looks. She dressed straight at her points and put the whole drive of her ruthless spirit behind her malicious wit.

Sybil's main trouble was that, just as her mother's beauty haunted the lost battle-field of her looks, so in some strange way, in the background of Sybil's predatory spirit, there lurked a dangerous spark of her mother's tireless generosity.

This was not enough to deflect her ruthlessness; but it sometimes made the object of her fierce desires, once attained, seem something of a responsibility.

It was as if a cat caught and killed a mouse and then, disregarding its own appetite, presented the corpse to some philanthropic institution.

Sybil's father was the worst type of family bully.

Her mother, who had often been on the point of running away with one or the other of her numerous admirers, had always been held back by her religion and her children. She had, however, died, as soon as the opportunities for running away ceased.

Sybil meant to win the game of life, without dying. She set out to play it, with a gambler's courage and a business man's precision; but she damaged herself badly at the start by falling in love with a charming, pert, cleverish fellow, who looked,

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

or thought he looked, like one of England's most famous 'Fans'.

For a time Sybil held her own in the difficult sport of make-believe, vanity, and shallow passion, which splashed about the feet and ankles of these semi-lovers, but at last she went in too far; while the young man scrambled safely to the shore and ran away when he had reached it.

He was still really a little in love with Sybil, but he had that self-preservative instinct given to charming and rather pert young men, which is sometimes denied to cleverer but perhaps less charming young women.

Sybil, who had thought her power over the young man as great as her desire for him, was appalled by his brisk retreat.

Her vanity was cut to the core, and something deeper than her vanity roused in her a sense of active warfare against mankind.

She set her straight thin lips, on which she laid a rather brighter scarlet than before, and said to herself: 'I now know the worst of this rough-and-tumble between men and women—and will act accordingly!' And in six months' time she had succeeded in marrying the richest booby in the neighbourhood. Eustace Meade had not wanted marriage. He very wisely feared clever women; but when he found that he was irresistible to the cleverest woman of his acquaintance, he compassionately relented. Sybil was apparently dying of love for him, and Eustace, who was very kind-hearted, decided that she must not be allowed to die.

He became fonder and fonder of her until the fatal day, when he was led by Sybil, in ivory satin, old lace, and a thoroughly reliable make-up, to the altar.

The church was filled with blue hydrangeas and madonna lilies. 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden' was touchingly invoked; and after the ceremony they swung down the aisle together drugged by the seething sweetness with which Wagner baited Elsa and Lohengrin.

Eustace realized what he was in for very shortly afterward, but he continued to pin his solid good faith upon a romantic version of Sybil. In this faith he proceeded to carry on a difficult married life, half of which was a delusion and the other half a snare.

A GAME OF SKILL

Sybil hated him. She hated his good faith; his fondness; and his golf balls which she was always picking up in the hall. She also despised him for his inability to hurt her feelings.

The advantages of marrying Eustace wore off sooner than Sybil had expected. She soon got used to a large house, competent servants, and money enough to do herself thoroughly well. Sybil was, of course, worldly; but she found that the unfortunate thing about worldliness is that its rewards are rather less than its appetites. Still she had no other appetites, so that she went on being worldly just the same.

Her marriage gave her a good social position with the power to entertain admirably; but it was not quite what she had coveted.

County people whom she had always wanted to know were less interesting than she had imagined before she had met them.

She rapidly grew tired of endless good-nature of the more primitive kind.

She found that great people liked good entertainments, but seldom cared for those which were better than their own; and that they rather suspected, than admired, unusual charm or wit.

Not even Eustace's stupidity was any real help to her. It was not cheerful enough. Besides, the Best People very often had brains of their own peculiar sort, behind their stupidity; and behind Eustace's stupidity were merely deeper layers of the same substance.

He couldn't, however rich he was, get into Parliament nor be made Lord Lieutenant of his county.

He couldn't really run the family business, and had just sense enough not to try.

He was a good cricketer; and had a low golf handicap; but he was a monosyllabic, hangdog host, and people preferred simpler entertainments than Sybil's, where they were not obliged to watch their host being crucified. Nor was it really much use Sybil's being diabolically cruel to Eustace, for after a time he ceased to respond to her cruelty. Sybil became unpopular. Very clever people found her wit rather too vicious, and stupid ones were downright afraid of her.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

The in-between kind took up a good deal of her time, but did her no particular good.

A year after her marriage, Sybil had a baby girl.

She had meant this child to be a boy; and so had Eustace, in so far as he had meant anything. Still Eustace took a great fancy to his baby girl. It would be quite a long time before she could see how stupid her father was; and meantime she clung to his fingers and made cheerful noises whenever he came into the nursery.

After the baby's birth, Sybil felt weak and frustrated for a few days, and uncertain which rôle would suit her best. Should she be an injured martyr with a burden thrust upon her by a brutal husband or should she plump for the maternal instinct and become the best mother in the world?

There is a good deal of scope in the maternal instinct for the kind of gifts which Sybil knew that she possessed. When the doctor told her that a little wholesome neglect was what children thrive on most, she instantly changed him for a man who thought that a child's greatest blessing is its mother's love.

The child absorbed so much of Sybil's attention that Eustace for a short time benefited by the absence of it, and left his golf balls about more than ever. Unfortunately, when Doris grew old enough to show a preference, in the perverse way of children she showed a preference for her father.

This Sybil finally succeeded in stamping out, but not until she had upset Eustace more than it is good for a man to be upset, and weakened her child's confidence in mankind.

Eustace became more and more morose and difficult. He sank from monosyllables to grunts. People quite forgot how good-natured he had once been. Even his dogs weren't perfectly sure of him; and this is a very bad sign, for it takes a lot of hydrophobia in a man to put his dogs off him.

Meanwhile, Sybil consoled herself by making a wonderful drama out of her love for her baby girl.

Many other women whose husbands became so totally uninteresting would have sought the greater liveliness of some other man. But Sybil never forgot the pert young man who had so conspicuously floored her; and she preferred the simple bar-

barism of a young child rather than the more sophisticated barbarism of a new lover.

She and her daughter Doris became inseparable.

Doris remained an only child. Everything she took a fancy to was given to her. Everything she disliked was instantly removed. She tore her way through a small fortune in toys; and relays of nurses left her with the relieved alacrity of acrobats alighting from a trapeze.

When anything balked Doris (and the weather and live animals were sometimes uncontrollable), every function in her body and mind flew into instant insurrection. If the insurrection failed, Doris became very ill; and when she was ten years old—she died.

Perhaps she might have recovered if Eustace, left in charge for a few fatal moments, had not given her the strawberries which she hectically demanded. Strawberries are not the diet for acidosis; but then acidosis is not a disease which afflicts the children of well-trained parents.

Doris's death was to Sybil the end of the world; and it is probable that Eustace felt it a good deal too.

Sybil took every precaution that he should, and few men like to have an only child's death laid regularly at their door.

Sybil increased Eustace's sense of strain by having one of her slight attacks of conscience on the subject. She never actually told Eustace in so many words that he had killed Doris. But in the back of his mind Eustace had the feeling that Sybil might say it at any moment, and that if she did, he would know that it was true.

He went on playing golf and cricket; partly to get away from the emptiness of his home and partly because all the men he knew played games; besides Sybil didn't.

Every June since he was ten years old Eustace had given a cricket match in his own park.

This yearly match, besides bringing back a fugitive sense of his own importance, reminded him of the happiest years of his life, when he was at a preparatory school, where he had been a good bat, and no-one had yet found out how stupid he was.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Eustace would fasten on his pads with fingers tingling with happiness, walk over to the sunny pitch faultlessly rolled, enjoying his beautifully laundered flannels, and conscious of the tough, stringy handle of his bat, as if it were the touch of a lover.

The knowledge that he could use the bat as well as anybody in the field and better than most made his play a reliable asset to the neighbourhood, even if he did not make a remarkable number of runs.

Eustace felt secure in the knowledge of how good his pitch was, and how splendid a tea Sybil would provide, even if she were nasty about it afterward.

The year after Doris's death, Sybil said: 'Of course you'll give up the cricket match this June!'

Eustace felt his heart lurch suddenly like a ship struck by a squall, but, after a moment's piteous panic, he pulled himself together and mumbled: 'Can't let the whole neighbourhood down!'

He expected more—and worse—to follow. Sybil, however, merely fixed him with her sharp green eyes which looked like small gooseberries made of glass, and said nothing.

Eustace appeased a slight twinge of conscience caused by Sybil's unexpected generosity; and said to himself: 'She can go on a visit, if she wants to avoid the Beano, or shut herself up!' Cricket is not a game that hurts dead little girls, or should increase the grief even of the most sensitive parents.

Sybil surprised Eustace, however, by appearing quite insensitive about making her appearance on the day of the match. She made the usual preparations for tea on the usual lavish scale: then she dressed in delicate black and white, and received Eustace's guests as if nothing had happened.

It was a slumberous summer afternoon. The sun was hot. The gold-green oak leaves, hiding the vast old trees, hung still. The green velvet pitch was smooth as a damask cloth. White marquees were dotted about the park glistening like sugar icing. Champagne-cup was to be found by the bucket. New and lawless cocktails were shaken all day long. Savoury sandwiches, with their contents plainly marked, were unavoidable and limitless; and there were mountains of large firm strawberries.

A GAME OF SKILL

The smart guests from town sat at small tables in a secluded marquee; and there was a long table spread beneath the trees for more promiscuous neighbours who liked to talk gardens.

Even the deer took their share in the entertainment, by grouping themselves statuesquely at a convenient distance, or fleeing, light as shadows, from imaginary enemies.

The garden looked as only an English garden in June can look. Herbaceous borders streamed by the side of grass paths like an army with banners.

On the unruffled surface of an artificial lake, water-lilies and swans poised, harmoniously sure of themselves, and contemptuously unaware of any other existences.

Eustace was so happy that he hardly dared to breathe.

After all, he thought for the first time since Doris died, it was not for nothing that his father had handed on to him this unencumbered estate, founded upon soap. Perhaps he would make a century; and anyhow, all the faces he was accustomed to beamed at him; and he was going to give a jolly good time to almost everyone he knew.

He was fastening on his pads to be ready when his time came to go in when he was suddenly aware that Sybil stood beside him.

There was no-one near them.

He looked down at her from a great height, for he was very tall and Sybil was very short. He thought it was nice of her to seek him out, and the sense of his height and of the manliness of his favourite pastime made Eustace feel for a moment as he used to feel before he knew that his wife utterly despised him.

She had the look of an arrow strung for flight. He did not notice at first that she was carrying a small plate of strawberries.

Sybil had a low but rather piercing voice. Her words ran on in his head long after she had finished speaking them.

'This is the anniversary of Doris's death,' she reminded him. 'Would you not like some strawberries?'

He turned away and left her before she had quite finished speaking. He heard his name called and stumbled, sick and sullen, towards the wickets.

The sun blazed on the field, and all the small white figures waiting for him spun through his shaking mind.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Sybil watched Eustace uneasily for a few minutes. Conscience trapped her. She had a queer impulse to cry out to him to stop. But she soon reassured herself. Eustace was playing even better than usual. Nothing dreadful would happen. Everything dreadful had already happened. Eustace was simply too stupid to suffer. It was only she, who stood, nailed to the soft earth, in unrelenting grief for her dead child.

Sybil gave a sharp sigh; put down the plate of strawberries on the nearest table; and went to the tea-tent to see that the guests from town were being properly served.

It was hot and noisy inside the tent; but everyone could get to the tables easily and find whatever they wanted. It was noticeable when the noise died down, and all those fashionable heads turned automatically in the same direction.

Sybil was conscious that her well-organized festivity had received a sudden check, but she was too short to see the cause over the heads of the crowd.

Someone said her name in a low voice—and people melted away to each side, leaving a narrow lane from where she stood to the door of the tent.

The local doctor, whom Sybil had dismissed for his unacceptable attitude towards the sanctity of motherhood, stood at the tent door.

He looked as if he had been running. He said in a breathless voice: 'Excuse me. Will you come outside for a minute, Mrs. Meade?'

Sybil's heart missed a beat. She was conscious, as she moved steadily forward, that everyone hastened to make way for her, as if this sudden summons had made her sacred to them.

She had felt slighted by not being noticed when she had come into the tent a few minutes before, but they were all noticing her now; and it flashed through her mind that she would have preferred to feel slighted again.

The doctor drew her away from the door of the tent, under the shelter of the trees. 'Your husband has had an accident,' he told her. 'There is nothing to be done for him just now, but I think you'd better leave your guests—and come with me.'

Eustace was lying in the shade. His face was the colour of the

A GAME OF SKILL

Oriental poppies in the herbaceous border; and one side of it was horribly twisted.

He was surrounded by a group of cricketers, but they drew off a little as they saw Sybil approach.

The doctor explained that he did not want Eustace moved just yet. 'It's a touch of sun,' he murmured, to make it easier for her.

But Sybil knew that it was not the sun that had touched her husband. She knelt down beside Eustace and took up his hand. It was very heavy.

The startled guests streamed slowly out of the park till it was empty except for the spectral browsing deer and the green and golden oaks.

It was that serene and timeless hour of a June day when light stands still and waits for night to overtake it. Rooks flying homeward dropped, through the silent air, their last punctilious messages.

The doctor said that they could safely carry Eustace to his room now.

Eustace's room was cool and exquisitely kept. The second housemaid had put fresh sweet peas upon the dressing-table that very morning.

'He is so young a man still,' the doctor said reassuringly, 'that I am sure—when he comes round—a certain amount of readjustment will take place.'

Sybil looked at Eustace's face; and said, after a pause, 'Sometimes, when things happen, it is too late for readjustment Dr. Burns.'

He said very earnestly and kindly as if she had never dismissed him for being an honest man, 'I do hope not, Mrs. Meade—I do hope not! Please just leave him perfectly quiet now. If someone could sit by him till the nurse comes!'

Sybil said with a strange smile, 'Oh—yes—someone will always sit by him.'

When the doctor had gone, Sybil took a chair and sat alone by Eustace's bedside, watching his flushed, contorted face.

She knew now why her mother had not run away and left her children.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'Only I shan't die, because dying isn't easy!' Sybil said to herself. 'I'm too tough!'

When Eustace came round, he stared up at Sybil, with eager, laughing eyes:

'Marvellous!' he said thickly. 'Marvellous—! God!' And then, after a longer pause, 'God!'

It seemed as if he had been withdrawn into a world filled by an inexhaustible jest.

These two words—and only these two words—Eustace could say quite intelligibly for the rest of his life. His eyes, which had been growing for twelve long years sadder and sadder, were filled now with inextinguishable laughter. He could never communicate what his joke was; but he never stopped laughing. Even when he slept, a smile strayed across his lips. Later on, Eustace could shuffle with help into a carrying-chair. He liked gramophones and wireless. He enjoyed his food; he slept.

He was, in fact, perfectly strong and well; and he was not an idiot. The doctor was very emphatic upon this point: 'Mrs. Meade, your husband must be treated as a reasonable person,' he explained. 'He *is* a reasonable person. Only certain brain centres are not acting normally at present. Those that control speech and motion have been disturbed; but, as I said before, in the course of time—considering that he is barely forty—a good deal of readjustment can take place. The will helps in these cases. Life should be made as pleasant for him, and as full of incentives, as possible.'

'I will see to that,' Sybil said quietly.

She made life very pleasant for Eustace. All her wits, and all the drive of that insensate lust for power, which she had used to wreck him, were at his service now. To help her look after him, she found a very sweet and pretty young nurse, with whom Eustace was delighted.

He chuckled and laughed with her all day long. Joke after joke blossomed between them. It was an idyllic relationship; and it completely shut out his wife. Yet this, too, she accepted. Sybil never left him, and she never took from him one of his innocent delights.

A GAME OF SKILL

'It's almost like father and daughter, to see your husband with that nice young nurse,' the doctor (who had forgotten about Doris) said one day to Sybil.

Sybil looked at him with a queer light in her green eyes, and said: 'Oh—quite!'

She was not jealous of the little nurse. She wanted Eustace to have everything which could make him happy. She would have broken her body into pieces to make a fire to warm his hands.

All her bright malice had deserted her. She met the continuous laughter of Eustace's defeated eyes—that blank and bubbling laughter—with an unchanging gentleness. The shame of what she had done to him swallowed up all other shame. She often took her friends in to see him.

The county people were unexpectedly kind. Sybil found she had far more friends now than when she was young and successful.

All her relatives and Eustace's rallied round her, and she schooled herself to meet, undaunted, the complacent pity of their eyes.

'You should surely go away now and then,' they would urge; 'you will ruin your health.' And they actually invited Sybil for week-ends—or to go with them to Scotland to kill stags; but Sybil never went.

She would thank them with eyes in which, although they smiled, the grip of her fathomless remorse never unclenched itself.

It was strange that, in spite of so much unswerving care and devotion, Eustace should make no readjustment.

But was it, Sybil sometimes asked herself, so strange? Or was the jest—that incommunicable, ceaseless jest, which lurked forever behind the laughter of Eustace's eyes—the last move in that game of skill between them which, before his final withdrawal into a world of his own, Sybil had always won?

THE BATTLE-FIELD

Everyone said: 'What a sweet dear girl Madeline Writtle is! What a pity that she is so delicate!'

Her delicacy made Madeline look a great deal younger than she was, and prevented her from doing things that she sometimes thought she would have liked to do, and sometimes knew that she would not.

She was the apple of her mother's eye.

As the years slipped nonchalantly past her, Madeline grew more and more sweet and dear; and more and more delicate.

Finally she became definitely ill.

Her mother nursed her night and day with unexampled fortitude and skill. Madeline had the best advice, and at least half a dozen expensive treatments for diseases from which, it turned out afterwards, she had never suffered.

At last her mother heard that at Davos there was a specially good sanatorium, run by a young English 'genius'. Roughly speaking, Hugh Potter had not got genius, but he had an unusual amount of common-sense.

All sorts and kinds of lung patients were under his charge; some of them became a great deal better, and some of them were actually cured.

Of course occasionally some of them died; but then consumptive patients will do this anywhere, if they are not careful; and sometimes even if they are.

From the first, Madeline liked the look of Dr. Hugh Potter. He was lean and hatchet-faced, and had kind grey eyes, which did not look particularly hard at her.

Madeline had been examined by dozens of doctors. She made no kind of fuss at having her blood tested, nor did she mind her arm being crushed in an india-rubber band, in order to have

her blood pressure examined; and when she was being stethoscoped, she coughed discreetly, and not in the doctor's face.

After she had been X-rayed and sounded with the utmost thoroughness, Dr. Potter led her back into his sunny office, and made her sit in a particularly easy chair opposite his desk.

Madeline was by now very exhausted, but too interested to show it. She had a feeling that this time she really was going to find out what was the matter with her.

Dr. Potter asked her none of the usual questions. Instead, he offered her a cigarette, and lit one of his own. His speculative, unaggressive eyes gazed past her out of the window.

'What do you think yourself', he asked at last, 'that you are suffering from?'

To Madeline's surprise, she found herself speaking the truth. This was not a habit of hers, because the truth is often painful to others; and sometimes to oneself. No sweet dear girl can ever afford any great indulgence in candour, and Madeline, when she was feeling despondent, automatically lied.

'I don't know what is the matter with me!' she exclaimed, 'I sometimes think nothing is! I mind this worst of all. It makes me feel so guilty and extravagant! When doctors say I am a little run down—or it is only nerves—I cry my eyes out; for if this is all it is—and it makes me feel so deadly ill—how can I ever get any better? I am not just tired and sick of everything, I feel sick of being ill too! If I can't get better, I should like to die!'

Dr. Potter listened to this outburst with sympathetic attention. 'When you say you feel sick of everything,' he asked her, 'does it include "everybody"—or any particular person?'

Madeline hesitated. 'People tire me so,' she answered; 'except Mother—Mother's wonderful!'

She drew a deep breath and began to tell Dr. Potter all about her mother. This made her forget that she was tired. Very few grown-up daughters ever had such a perfect maternal relationship; and Madeline, with a flushed face and brilliantly sparkling eyes, poured out a striking picture of their miraculously harmonious tie. She had always admired her mother. She could scarcely remember her father, who died of lung trouble after a long and terrible illness. Her mother had nursed him with unflinching

THE BATTLE-FIELD

care and affection, but there was from the first no hope. Mrs. Writtle was left a young and attractive widow with two little girls, Madeline and her elder sister Caroline.

Caroline was a very strong character, and both Madeline and her mother leaned on Caroline; but Madeline had sometimes wished that her elder sister were a shade less powerful.

Caroline, with ruthless unselfishness, did everything for Madeline and her mother. In spite of her home cares Caroline's school work was brilliant. She had a voice like a nightingale; and out of a long list of devoted admirers, whom she alternately attracted and repelled, Caroline became engaged to a particularly nice young man called 'George'.

And then Caroline was drowned, in a swimming race, in the open sea. The sea became extremely rough; all the other competitors turned back, but Caroline swam on. Her mother and Madeline saw her drown before their eyes. They were quite helpless, of course, and George, who had an inveterate dislike of swimming-races, was not there.

Mrs. Writtle had become for several months completely incapacitated, and Madeline and George (Caroline's devoted fiancé) had had a dreadful, but somehow or other rather stimulating, time looking after her.

A fresh catastrophe, of a very different though equally painful nature, heralded the recovery of Mrs. Writtle. George, although he was broken-hearted, developed an ungratifying passion for Madeline's mother.

In the end—since he quite refused to get over it—they had to give George up.

This had been a great shock to them both, for by now they had come to lean on George.

Madeline began to be definitely ill, instead of merely very delicate, and had gone on being ill ever since.

Madeline found it rather odd telling Dr. Potter this long story, because it seemed to have nothing to do with her lungs, but somehow or other, prompted by a few unaggressive but intelligent questions, the story of her life came out.

When Madeline had quite finished, and let George go—as she had let him go in real life—with a pang half of relief and

half of direst agony, Dr. Potter remained for several minutes restfully silent. Madeline stared unseeingly at the golden peaks which faced the sanatorium across the narrow valley.

The beauty of the peaks did not mean anything to Madeline. No beauty had meant anything to her since her mother had said, 'I am never going to see George again!' with a noble gesture of complete renunciation, which had included Madeline.

'You have something the matter with your lungs,' Dr. Potter said at last. 'But you can get over it, you know. You needn't feel a fraud. It is quite definite; but people have had more the matter with them than you have, and yet got better, and people have had less, and succeeded in dying of it. You see there is quite a wide margin of choice in these matters.'

'I think if you do exactly what I tell you, and have confidence in my power to help you, you can get well; but I should like to be sure of your loyal co-operation before I undertake your case. Will you tell me quite truthfully—what you really feel about it?'

'What I feel about—what?' Madeline asked him, with a startled sensation at the pit of her stomach. 'I don't quite understand what you mean. I always do what my doctors tell me. Mother will tell you I am considered a very good patient.'

'What do you feel about getting well?' Dr. Potter gently persisted. 'You see, you can be a good patient, and yet not be what I consider a good case.'

'When I undertake a case, I want to know that the patient really wants to get well!'

'Patients aren't ill because they want to be. There is no easy solution—like Christian Science—in the scientific world. But behind the organic trouble which has come upon the patient, perhaps from infection or exposure, perhaps from some more subtle and less easily ascertainable cause, there lies sometimes a very definite obstacle to recovery—the aim of the patient to escape through his illness—from a position which has become intolerable to him.'

'We all have a private goal, sometimes it is a secret even from ourselves; but it is part of a doctor's business to find out what his patient's goal is—before the illness can be successfully dealt with.'

THE BATTLE-FIELD

Madeline thought this over very carefully. She was an intelligent woman, though she had not always found it convenient to use her intelligence. She began to wonder for the first time whether she did really want to get quite well? What would she do if recovery were granted to her?

She was thirty-five and did not intend to marry. Nor did she have any career to take up again. She had always been nice about religion, but not enthusiastic. She and her mother liked reading out loud. Their favourite books were usually about the love affairs of kings' mistresses. They referred to them as 'Historical Memoirs', and felt that these dubious researches were quite above ordinary novels. But even if Madeline remained ill, they could still read out loud, or at any rate her mother could still read out loud to Madeline.

Madeline said emphatically after a long reflective pause: 'Of course I want to get well! It would be such an intense relief to Mother if I were! It's too awful to think what she's been through—and I can't bear having to go on torturing her!'

'Well, then,' said Dr. Potter, with a charming smile, in which, however, there was something a little quizzical, 'we'll try it out. But I shall want the whole of your active co-operation. To begin with, I am afraid that you must come into the sanatorium for a time. Your mother can remain in Davos if she wishes, but we don't allow relations to stay in the sanatorium with the patients. We have our own nurses.'

Madeline stared at him in blank incredulity. 'But Mother'—she began—'is such a perfect nurse! No trained nurse can touch her. Nobody else has ever done things for me. We've never once been parted. We aren't rich at all—but we have enough to stay on here together; and Mother, I know, has never dreamed of leaving me—she'll be—we couldn't—I don't think you understand—!'

Madeline broke off breathless, gazing at Dr. Potter with helpless entreaty. He met her gaze with courteous inflexibility.

'It isn't', he said gently, 'a question of money or of your mother's capacity to nurse you. She can come in every day to see you in the visiting hours. We have very generous ones. From ten to twelve, from four to six in the afternoons, and from eight

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

to ten in the evenings; so it is practically the whole day, you see, and the intervening hours are those in which we wish the patient to be alone and not to speak. This is one of the points in which you must have sufficient confidence in me. If you do not have it, I should not advise you to become my patient!’

Madeline’s eyes dropped to the floor. She felt that it would be restful to trust him. He seemed able to let her confide in him, without in any way getting the better of her by his knowledge. She felt, too, that it wasn’t for himself—it was for her sake that he wanted to know the truth of her being.

This hidden goal that he had spoken of was a secret to Madeline; but she suddenly knew that she wanted to find the secret out, and that she was willing for Dr. Potter to help her to find it.

She already liked him enough to want to like him more. But her liking for Dr. Potter was that of a drowning man for a straw; it would not lead, she knew, to anything like that irritated agony which she had once felt for George.

About that cruel business she had always been wholly silent; and she was silent now. It had made never seeing George again like cutting the heart out of her body. But such a wildly beating heart that she had felt at the time—perhaps she would get on better without it.

How wonderful her mother had been, never to have cared for George, or if she had cared for him, decently, as a woman over forty should care for a dead daughter’s fiancé, how fine of her to have pushed this affection aside, so that she could give her undivided heart to her living daughter! Madeline and her mother were all in all to each other.

No other man could ever now perturb their sacred relationship.

Madeline said, after a long pause: ‘Perhaps we can explain to Mother—but there must be no question of my having in any way to desert her. I couldn’t do that, you know. I shouldn’t get better if I had to bear the burden of any pain I was causing her.’

Dr. Potter said quickly: ‘It needn’t appear like that, I think. I’d like to talk to her now—if I may. You’re very tired I can see. May I ring for Nurse to take you into the lounge and give

you tea? Or, if you've quite decided to stay on with us, she might take you up to your room at once. We could telephone for your luggage later.'

'But I can't decide without asking Mother!' Madeline expostulated. 'How can I? It is just what I mean I mustn't do! It would seem like deciding against her. I can't do that!'

Madeline looked up at him uneasily. Fear cramped her heart. How disappointed she would be if her mother refused to let her go into the sanatorium! And yet how could they expect her mother not to refuse when the plan involved their virtual separation? Madeline could not press for it, when (unless she seemed to hate it, too) her mother might suffer an unpardonable betrayal.

'If I were you,' said Dr. Potter gravely, 'I would decide now—by myself. I will explain to your mother anything that you wish explained. Your best interest must be, I feel sure, what she most desires.'

'Yes—oh, yes!' moaned Madeline. She could not admit, even to Dr. Potter, that her mother's belief in Madeline's best interest would never involve any withdrawal from her own inexorable maternal care. 'But I must just ask her—Dr. Potter!' Madeline feebly murmured. 'I can't let it seem to be a decision arrived at away from her.'

'But I think you can,' Dr. Potter urged, still very gently. 'You are of an age to make such a decision for yourself, and I should strongly advise you to make it now, Miss Writtle. If you leave it until you have seen your mother, you may find it much more difficult to press. Whereas, if you take for granted that she would want what is a necessary part of your cure, you will be helping her to accept this separation much more easily.'

Waves of heat and cold passed in turn over Madeline's sensitive body. Did she want—or did she not want—this sudden cleavage? How disloyal the word 'separation' sounded, and how cruel the loneliness which she was enforcing upon her mother's heart, as well as upon her own! She knew, if she once saw her mother's pained, devoted eyes and heard her gentle voice saying, 'But, my darling—we shouldn't be together!' everything but blank surrender to her mother's wishes would be

impossible. Did she want to make this surrender, after all? Or did she wish to stay in the sanatorium by herself?

'Oh, please—I can't bear it!' she whispered.

Dr. Potter got up at once. 'You wish me to fetch your mother, then?' he asked in a voice studiously devoid of any pressure—even of encouragement.

'No! Not my mother!' Madeline heard herself gasp. Anguish swallowed her; but at the bottom of her anguish she felt a strange relief.

Dr. Potter rang a bell at his elbow, and a smiling young woman came to the door. 'Nurse Mitchell,' he said, 'this is Miss Writtle, our new patient. Please take her up to No. 24, and make her comfortable. I should like her to have some tea immediately.'

Then he turned back to Madeline. 'I'll explain everything to your mother,' he said, and as she looked into the impersonal kindness of his eyes, the feeling of relief deepened.

The strangest part of the whole thing was that Mrs. Writtle seemed unaware of any conflict having been necessary. From the first she took the sanatorium for granted. When Madeline said, 'It's so dreadful, darling, to think of being here by myself—and your having to be in some horrible place alone!' her mother had said: 'Ah, but you see, dearest, it's all part of the cure. Lung patients have to be in sanatoriums—and one quite understands doctors not wanting relations! One has only to think of what some relations are! I quite like my little hotel. It's only a stone's throw away. I can see your windows.'

It was but another proof of her mother's courage and patience. Madeline felt with crushed humility how still more wonderful her mother was, and how dreadful it was of her not to mind that, wonderful or not, she was—at any rate—a stone's throw away!

When Madeline woke in the morning, even after a bad night, and she generally had bad ones, she felt a strange sense of refreshment and peace.

She liked her large, light room, with practically nothing in it but air and light.

She could look from her bed, through wide-open windows, straight into the sky. Her eyes lost themselves in the blueness of great distances.

THE BATTLE-FIELD

She did not want to have her bed taken out onto the balcony—that felt somehow exposed and tiring. The sun was too strong a companion for her brittle strength. She wanted just to lie in her room, and let the sweet, keen air pour over her, not to have to speak or smile, or say: 'I'm better today, darling!' when she wasn't! She felt an unutterable relief.

By the time her mother came, the worst of the morning was already over. Madeline had been washed and had had her breakfast; and got over the reaction from the bad night which followed so soon upon the first relief of day. She knew that when it was twelve o'clock she would be alone again. Once more Madeline could close her eyes and feel as if the blueness of the distance had swallowed her vexed consciousness into its serene unconsciousness.

Hour after hour slipped by in uninterrupted peace. At one o'clock Nurse would come in with a joke and a smile, and all manner of little dishes on a tray, which were to tempt Madeline to eat. She came back again just before two; but Nurse did not say anything, or look at all grieved, when the tray—very little emptier—had to be carried out again.

Just at first, Madeline felt the early afternoon hours a burden. She grew bored and restless. Fever started up and made her apprehensive and rudderless. She found herself longing for her mother's watchful tenderness. But after a week or two Madeline hardly noticed the daily rise of temperature. A new quietness stole into her being. She noticed, instead, the pine trees, and watched the slow, friendly light pass from branch to branch, interrupted sometimes by the bright flash of a bird's wing, or the friendly scuttle of a leaping squirrel.

Madeline felt the silence sink, deeper and deeper, into her separate heart. Her mother did not come to see her after the tea hours were over; and when she had left her, the red light outside Madeline's door sprang on, and Dr. Potter came in, later than he visited his other patients. He used to stay quite a long time with Madeline, ten minutes always, sometimes a quarter of an hour. She did not know if she liked their strange talks, but she knew that she lived on them.

He always knew how she was, without her having to tell him.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

He did not praise her, nor find her heroism touching, as most doctors did, for as far as pain and physical discomfort were concerned, Madeline was a heroine. He seemed, instead, to turn away from the struggle of her outer being, and to attack a citadel which she had never even known she was defending. Sometimes he laughed at her a little, but only when he could make her laugh at herself with him; and he pointed out to her ways in which she could get the better of what had once seemed to Madeline her virtues.

Her symptoms he listened to, if she made him, but he did not seem to attach much importance to them.

Madeline did not go on making Dr. Potter listen. She let everything go, except what he put into her hands.

He asked her to let one of the other patients look in for a minute or two after supper, nor did he seem to mind if Madeline found it tiring.

The patient he suggested her seeing was a girl called Clara; other patients came, too, sometimes, but Madeline hardly counted them as her real visitors. It was true, they told her intimate things about themselves—their troubles and their joys. Madeline gave them her full attention, she looked at them with her soft kind eyes as if she liked them. She never judged people, she wanted to let them off from all their difficulties, even from their crimes. She never had advice for them—only appreciation for whatever they had decided to do; and the sanatorium patients found her—as everybody had always found her—wonderfully sweet and dear. But Clara was different—she seemed to penetrate below the surface of Madeline's ready sympathy. Madeline found that she sometimes said to Clara things that she really meant.

Her mother noticed at once that Clara's visits tired Madeline.

She did not approve of any of Madeline's visitors; and indeed Madeline herself sometimes felt that people stayed too long and had too many troubles; but Madeline had not felt these drawbacks to Clara's visits.

When Madeline told Dr. Potter that her mother felt that she was seeing too many visitors, he said,

'Do you talk a great deal to your mother?'

'In a way, I do,' Madeline admitted, 'but, you see, anyone one knows so well isn't tiring! It's not like a conversation. You lie quite still, and just say whatever comes into your head to say—or you don't talk at all—Mother's just there—in my mind—if you know what I mean?'

Dr. Potter knew what Madeline meant, but he did not agree with her. He shook his head laughingly. 'Don't you sometimes think that's a lazy way of living?' he asked her. 'You can hardly make your mind work at all if the other mind you live with is so accessible to yours. And your mind must work or it loses grip—your body, too, if things are made too easy for it, that loses grip as well. You can't separate body and mind.'

Madeline left this to think about when he'd gone. She used to spend half her wakeful nights thinking over what Dr. Potter had said to her, and trying to practise it. She would talk to her mother about these things in the mornings, but her mother did not find that Dr. Potter was always right. She liked him, but she thought he hardly knew what was good for Madeline as well as she herself did.

Even in the most perfectly run sanatoriums things do go wrong. A meal once in a while was incorrectly ordered, a nurse once or twice forgot a medicine. These were things which, when Mrs. Writtle herself was nursing Madeline, could not conceivably have happened; but Dr. Potter never took these lapses as much to heart as Mrs. Writtle felt he should have taken them.

'Your mother thinks you sacred,' Dr. Potter pointed out to Madeline. 'Personally I think it's rather better that you shouldn't be nursed so splendidly. You'll get to feel more like other people if you have to rough it a little, and not quite so remote like a Madonna in a shrine.'

'In a shrine,' Madeline said, rather puzzled; 'of course I'm not at all like a Madonna—but what do you mean by a shrine?'

'Well, your mother thinks your ill-health is a kind of shrine,' Dr. Potter ventured after a brief pause. 'We look upon illness here as a thing to get rid of. I fancy your mother rather venerates it for itself.'

'It's only that she's so anxious,' Madeline told him, rather reprovingly.

'Yes—yes, of course!' Dr. Potter agreed hurriedly. 'That's the worst of devotion—its trade-mark is anxiety!'

'Don't you believe in being fond of people?' Madeline demanded; and it seemed to her as if her whole life was at stake, and in danger of being overturned. For what had she ever done but be fond of people? Her mother—Caroline—George—Clara! Was the entire accumulation of her years to be flung onto a rubbish heap by this young iconoclast?

'Well, of course, it depends on what you mean by "fond",' Dr. Potter admitted. 'No-one can help taking more pleasure in one human being rather than in another. But the test of affection is behaviour. If we behave rightly to anyone, we are fond enough—and if we're as it were too fond, we don't always behave rightly. We slacken the fibres of their hearts and our own into the bargain. That's not the prettiest kind of devotion, is it?'

'What a very curious idea!' said Madeline, which was from her almost as violent a repulse as if she had boxed Dr. Potter's ears.

However, he did not seem to mind having his ears boxed. One day he even asked Madeline what had happened to George, though he must have known that George was not a subject that she wished touched upon.

Madeline drew a quick breath of displeasure, but in the end she told Dr. Potter George's name, and even where he lived, and what his work was; and that he had never married. George had always been faithful to Caroline's—and her mother's—memories.

Then Dr. Potter took up the subject of Clara. 'Your mother', he said, 'tells me that her visits are very bad for you—and that you never see her without a rise of temperature and a bad night following. I rather wonder why that is?'

Madeline sighed deeply. 'Perhaps Mother is right,' she admitted reluctantly. 'I love seeing Clara, and I find her so interesting that perhaps it takes it out of me. But, Dr. Potter, what is it in me for—if it's not ever to be taken out? I think I'd rather go on being tired and just seeing Clara!'

'Perhaps', Dr. Potter suggested, 'it would be better if she came to see you earlier in the day. Say tea-time, instead of after dinner?'

THE BATTLE-FIELD

'But she can't do that!' Madeline said quickly; 'that's Mother's time!'

Thinking it over afterwards, Madeline wondered if it had not been the beginning of the trouble. Clara continued to drop in, and her mother continued not to like it. She saw that Clara's visits were doing Madeline more harm, and she expostulated with Madeline as well as with Dr. Potter.

Madeline said that Dr. Potter must settle whom she could see and whom she couldn't see; and her mother, after a strange cold pause, asked: 'Why? Hitherto you have considered me the best judge of what was good for you. After all, I've nursed you on and off for thirty-six years—and Dr. Potter has known you in a much more superficial way and only for a few months.'

This seemed unanswerable, and Madeline merely flushed painfully and grew that night more feverish than ever.

There was no doubt that Madeline was rapidly becoming worse. She suffered from blinding headaches. Her temperature ran up and up. She slept less; and the trays went down emptier and emptier.

Even Madeline herself at last did not want Clara to come.

One day Dr. Potter came into Madeline's room, and sat there for a long time without speaking. They knew each other so well by now that she did not feel afraid of his silence. She knew that it was being spent on her. He was thinking of some way to stop her pain or to get the fever down.

'Madeline', he said at last, 'do you remember our first talk together—do you trust me?'

She roused herself to look straight at him. 'More than anyone in the world,' she said, and then, with a faint smile, she added: 'Except Mother, of course.'

'I think that I want you to trust me rather more than that,' Dr. Potter said quietly. 'I want you to trust me as a human mind which has centred itself in the study of how to fight your disease—I do really know more about it than your mother, who loves you, and is sometimes deflected by her devotion from the knowledge of what is best for you.'

'Well—yes'—agreed Madeline—'I think I do—in that way—trust you even more! I hope it is not disloyal of me—

and I wouldn't want Mother to know it—but I expect I do trust you more. I do think you know better what is good for me.'

'Well, that's very satisfactory if you do think that,' Dr. Potter said gravely, 'because I am going to put you to the test. I do not want your mother to stay up in Davos any longer. You see too much of her. You get too absorbed in her anxiety for you. She is a point of conflict, and you are not strong enough for conflict. I want you to be here quite alone. I want you to have a being that is separate from your mother's. At first I thought we might manage this without sending your mother away; but I see that it is impossible, you lean on her too much. You can't, as people say, "exist without her". Well—that's no existence at all which is wholly dependent on the company of another human being. You would really enjoy her more if you were less dependent on her. She shuts you out from the circle of your own contemporaries. You cannot afford to let her do this. They—or she—must go! And for the moment they are better for you than she is. I must ask you to try to believe this and to strengthen my hand by agreeing to let her go. This must be a deep agreement on your part, Madeline. You mustn't just say, "Yes, Dr. Potter", and then lie here, crushed, and die on my hands. You must agree to get well, and to be happier alone.'

'To be happier alone——!' Madeline closed her burning eyes. She was always happier alone. She did not have to be divided then, to belong half to her mother, in whose being she felt the roots of her own; or pulled away from her by Dr. Potter and Clara into a new and sparkling life, with elements of sheer terror, just at a moment when she hardly felt enough of her old life left not to crumble into a bleak eternity.

Madeline herself knew that she was not getting well. Sometimes she would wake and feel Death in the room. She would remember George with the old agony and unrest; and think of her mother with a new agony and unrest—longing to live for her, longing to die, to be away from her. But how could she agree with Dr. Potter and send her mother from her, as if she were dismissing a faulty housemaid? Her mother, who was so fine and exquisite a personality—so unruffled and quiet a nurse,

so devoted and perfect a comrade? What did age matter, when they were both at one?

She opened her eyes and looked at Dr. Potter. 'Do you want me to break my mother's heart?' she asked, in a voice so harsh that she hardly recognized it for her own.

'That is an expression', Dr. Potter said coldly, 'which is more picturesque than solid. It is usually employed when a depressing feeling has to be faced, either by oneself or another person. To tell the truth, I expect your mother will feel more angry than broken-hearted; and the person she will be angry with—will be me! She may be a little shocked at your agreeing to follow my advice. However, you are too ill for her to say very much about it to you; and I don't mind her being angry—once I have convinced myself that you won't get better *with* her—and will get better *without* her.'

Madeline was silent for a long time. She tried to master her thoughts, but they kept revolving in her flustered mind. Her heart pounded against her side, like heavy seas against the side of a waterlogged boat. George kept coming into her mind. George being sent away so bravely, so self-sacrificingly—and with such an air of being got rid of for everybody's good all round. Even at the time, she had not wanted George to be sent away, and she had known that George hadn't wanted to go. But he had gone, of course. And now her mother was being sent away from her too—against her will, and half against her heart. She said to herself sternly: 'What a coward I must be—to have to be so protected! And always to hurt most those I care for most!'

She had not known that she spoke aloud until Dr. Potter answered her. 'Well, yes—perhaps rather a coward,' he said pleasantly, 'but as you grow stronger, you'll get over that. It's not, you know, altogether your fault that you are a coward. You've been brought up to be nice—and that's a dangerous profession. It's rather sapped your courage, here and there. You'll find that it will come back to you, once you've learned to be alone. That's the first step. Are you going to take it?'

Madeline did not hesitate at all now. She said: 'Yes, I'm going to take it. Tell Mother what you like——!'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

But after Dr. Potter had left her, she remembered that she would have to see her mother before she went.

Her mother's reddened eyelids and her quivering lips said all she could not say to Madeline. Madeline's stricken heart clamoured back: 'I am killing her—why am I killing her?'

Suddenly Mrs. Writtle's fortitude broke down. She leaned over Madeline and cried: 'Why are you sending me away from you—dearest?'

This was more than Madeline could bear. She cried out: 'Mother—oh, Mother! Don't leave me! I don't want you to go away!' A taste as bitter as salt was in her mouth. Suddenly something swelled up quite softly in her throat, and poured out over her hands and on the sheets, in a bright scarlet flood. Madeline saw a strange expression on her mother's face, a sort of excitement—like a justified prophet, seeing the city he loves and is banished from, destroyed by fire from on High. Madeline suddenly remembered what to do—she pushed a little red bell close to her—Dr. Potter had told her only yesterday that in three minutes after she rang it—from wherever he was in the sanatorium—he could reach her room. After she had pressed it, she stared helplessly at the terrible scarlet flood. It wasn't hurting her—that was something. But if it came any faster, it would choke her. Still she wasn't frightened. It was as if a Power, in spite of herself, had come to her assistance. She wouldn't have to stay with her mother; nor would her mother have to leave her.

The door opened, and Nurse was there—and Sister, following swiftly at her heels—and then Dr. Potter's face. Not at all tragic, but rather concentrated.

'We'll soon put a stop to this,' he said cheerfully.

And quite soon the haemorrhage stopped. Her mother was not there any more. Sister seemed to mind most about the sheets, but very soon the whole room was white and spotless again—and Dr. Potter smiled down at Madeline and said:

'Don't try to talk. If you want anything, you can whisper. Nurse will stay with you for a bit. I want you to suck this ice, and then you can go to sleep! I'll see about your mother.'

THE BATTLE-FIELD

So Madeline sucked ice, and slept; and when she woke up, they told her, her mother had gone.

Madeline had frightful headaches for a week afterwards, and could neither write nor read letters—but after that she began to feel slightly better. And one day Clara slipped into the room again.

Clara gave Madeline a fresh cool feeling, as if a nymph had come to visit her out of a stream. Clara was as cool and quiet as a snowdrop—and yet her thin face, with its black bands of hair round it, and lips with the side-ways smile, expressed the sort of fun a very ill person can safely enjoy.

Madeline loved seeing Clara. She told her how awful it was not having her mother. ‘You see,’ Madeline said, ‘all the time—half of me is her loneliness.’ But she did not say that the other half of her was relief.

Clara looked grave and full of sympathy, but after a little while she began to talk about the Schatz Alp instead. She had just been out for her first walk. It was astounding how much better Madeline began to feel.

The weeks slipped past her.

She sat up to have her bed made. She was allowed to wash herself. She sat up for tea. She liked lying out on the balcony now, and looking down over Davos. So large, and busy, and alive—and at dusk, its lights shone like a field of stars beneath her feet. And at last Madeline put her clothes on. Clara had made her like her clothes—and together they walked—a wonderful hundred yards into a blue sun-soaked pine wood; and Madeline knew that she was alive again.

‘Now,’ she thought to herself, ‘Mother ought to come back.’ And then she felt that she was trembling, from having walked so far, and all the blue went out of the sky and the fir scent from the pines. Clara’s frightened eyes made Madeline pull herself together; but after she had got back to her room in safety, she felt that she did not want to go for a walk again.

One day, while Madeline was on her balcony alone, after tea, enjoying the sunset, Nurse came in and said, ‘Would you like to see a visitor?’

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Madeline said, 'Yes, of course,' thinking it was Clara. But it was not Clara, she heard a man's step instead, and said to herself, 'Oh, bother! I suppose this is the new assistant—not Dr. Potter!' She thought it a little unkind of Dr. Potter not to come himself. And then suddenly she heard a voice say, 'Madeline!' and looking up, she saw George's face.

The air broke into a mist.

George did not look ten years older, but he had lost his slender, touching adolescence, which had once matched her own. He was more solid now, but the same George with the same delightful friendly smile, which started in his eyes and then travelled slowly downward to his rather heavy lips.

George explained that he'd been skiing in the neighbourhood—he'd met Potter—and Potter had asked him his name—and then told him that a friend of his was at the sanatorium—and wouldn't mind if he popped in.

'You're all right, aren't you?' George demanded, breaking off his explanation rather suddenly. 'You look too stunning for words! I hope you don't mind my having turned up. But it seemed silly, when we were so near each other not to look in.'

Madeline found her voice at last, the mist cleared away from George's face, and she said: 'Yes, it would have been silly not to look in.' After all, it wasn't Madeline whom he shouldn't see again—it was only her mother.

He told Madeline that he was staying at a village halfway between Davos and Klosters. But he did not go on staying at it very much, for the next two weeks he was at the sanatorium every day. He took Madeline out for walks, for sleigh rides, and every day to some new place for tea.

Madeline wondered if she ought to stop him; but she did not even write to tell her mother that George was there, or that the question of stopping George had again cropped up in a new form. For Madeline saw that George was in love with her. Perhaps he was in love with them all three—with Caroline in her grave—with her mother in her sacrificial banishment—and with Madeline in her illness. George had always had a tenderness for handicapped or broken creatures.

THE BATTLE-FIELD

He seemed, at any rate, blissfully happy, and if he had come to ski—it was not skiing that was making him happy.

At last he said to Madeline, not at all in a frightening way, but as if he was explaining something about which they already knew a good deal: 'Of course I'm still in love with you, you know!'

'Oh, but I'm old and ill!' cried Madeline quickly. 'Besides, you never were—it wasn't me you were in love with—then.'

'Funnily enough, you look a great deal younger,' said George, 'and yet more like—well, more like your mother—if you know what I mean. I always did admire your mother!'

'It is ten years ago,' said Madeline steadily, 'and she doesn't look so very much older now. She's still quite beautiful, George—and far more useful than I am. No wonder that you always admired her!'

George looked slightly uncomfortable. 'Well, yes—I dare say she is,' he admitted; 'still, you know, I can't quite forgive her. She needn't have packed me off for ever. I hadn't been married to Caroline—so even if that ridiculous law hadn't been changed—I wasn't your deceased sister's husband, was I?'

'That hadn't anything to do with it, though,' Madeline said rather shortly, 'seeing it wasn't me——' She stopped abruptly. Something in George's eyes stopped her.

'Oh, yes, it was!' George said, with great firmness; 'of course it was! Who else could it have been? Your mother said it would kill you to know about it. And of course you were most awfully delicate—I knew that. And you'd been so wrapped up in Caroline. And so was I, for the matter of that. But it's no use not getting over things, is it?'

Madeline opened her lips to speak, and then shut them again. Everything in her heart stood still and turned to ice. Her mother had lied to her. George had never loved her mother! Her mother had told Madeline that George loved her, in order to put Madeline off George. Perhaps her mother had loved George herself, but much more likely she had loved Madeline! This was the love from which Madeline had so nearly died! But for the sake of this love Madeline felt that she must shield her mother from

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

George—she must shield her mother from everyone—except herself.

‘No!’ Madeline said at last, drawing a long deep breath which seemed to blow away half her life. ‘No, George—I don’t think it’s ever any use—not getting over things!’

THE RESIDUE

Marie Céleste Condorcet sat in the twilight with her hands in her lap.

It was a short, silent hour, when the sun let go its grip of the villa, slipping from the red-bricked terrace down the precipitous steps into the burning sea.

In half an hour coolness and dense darkness would flow over the garden.

The leaves of the two great plane trees above her head would become black and as solid as iron, the house behind her a shadow, Madame herself a shadow.

There was no-one in the house. An hour since, her husband had changed his white coat for a black one; had rolled his Paris paper neatly in his hand to lend to a sick friend, had saluted his wife as if their parting were final, and descended the steps with his usual brisk and ineffective bustle.

He had never done very much in the world, Pierre Condorcet, but he had always bustled.

At sixty the daily drama of habit meant as much to him as it had at sixteen. He did not ask himself whither his string of unconnected actions led. He was as content in his mechanical performances as a dancing midge.

Claire Reboul, Madame Condorcet's married daughter, had embraced her mother and taken her two children away to bed. She brought the children daily to the terrace at three o'clock and removed them invariably at six.

Laure, the *bonne-à-tout-faire*, worked with her broom and her mop, punctually and thoroughly for four hours. She came at nine and left at one. The brick-floored, uncarpeted house yielded every inch of itself to her rebounding vigour. Silence settled down afresh after her retreat.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Madame Condorcet did her own cooking. Her home belonged to her, as her husband and her children belonged to her; she put into them all the immense force of her orderly personality. She was not intimate with them, but ironically, with a thoroughness beyond all mere enthusiasm, she knew them.

Their qualities and their weaknesses were as plain to her as the ingredients of the dishes with which she served them twice a day, at the appointed hours.

She was hardly ever in the small, spotless kitchen for more than five minutes at a time; her touch was creative, and she never wasted an unnecessary gesture.

There are people who have to make a fuss about their wishes, and, in the event of their failure, feel it compulsory to complain. But Madame Condorcet did not share this weakness. Her wishes never passed her lips; they solidified into facts or were buried in the silent depths of her consciousness.

She was a very delicate woman, but no-one had ever heard her complain of physical infirmity or seen it prevent her from carrying out her plans.

She accepted her bad health as she accepted the defective kitchen range, which it would have been too expensive to repair. It required a little more care than a good range, and Madame Condorcet gave it the care it required, but no more.

She was never in a hurry, and she never left anything undone. She could look back on her life as upon a smooth, unbroken thread, wound neatly and lightly around one particular spool.

She had not wanted to be married; deep in her fastidious, lonely soul she had a lasting resentment against personal surrender; but she had accepted marriage because without it she could not have had the spool.

The only alternative to marriage had been the convent, and Madame Condorcet was not religious. She wished to possess something of her own.

Life had been very much what she had expected it to be, the suffering a little sharper, the joys a little overestimated. Still, there had been great joys. Her children were joys; and her friendship with Thérèse Arnot had been a joy.

THE RESIDUE

It was the only friendship that Madame Condorcet had ever allowed herself, and it went deeper than her prejudices, it reached to the very bottom of her heart.

As she sat there immovable in the twilight, listening to the shriek of the tram turning the corner of the road beneath, or heard the sober rustling of an occasional rat crossing the terrace by her side to pick up an infrequent crumb, her mind reviewed vividly the stages of her one deep intimacy.

She was waiting for Thérèse Arnot. In half an hour perhaps Thérèse would arrive from the station and climb the stone steps of the high-terraced garden. She would pass the pungent bed of red geraniums turning black in the fading light and keenly sweet. She would lift her eyes to the trellis of pale plumbago rising in ghostly clusters against the wall, and know herself at home again.

She would be very welcome, and she would even be invited to share the evening meal.

Madame Condorcet did not lightly invite friends to meals; but for the sake of Thérèse she would be guilty of fundamental extravagance.

From the time she had entered the convent school when she was twelve years old, and had been put in charge of the small and turbulent Thérèse, she had given her the freedom of her heart. Thérèse had been a creature all curls and tempers, gaiety, stamps, and wet kisses; such a wild Thérèse! And Marie Céleste had been quiet, formidable, and serene; she hadn't at all approved of Thérèse, but she had never let her go.

They had been confirmed together, and received their first communion together, crowned with stiff little white flowers, and heavily veiled. They had felt mysterious and very important, although not very much had come of it afterward.

They had had measles together, and the Sisters had had to punish them together, though they knew that it was Thérèse alone who had committed the faults.

Marie Céleste did not commit faults, but she insisted on sharing all her friend's disgraces.

The Sisters had done their subtle, inflexible best to break this unsuitable relationship, but it was not made of anything

breakable. It lived on tragedy and survived separation; even familiarity never rusted its brightness.

To Thérèse, Marie Céleste was the only thing in the world that didn't break; to Marie, Thérèse was the authentic pathway to Romance.

When they left the convent they met daily at each other's houses.

The night that Pierre Condorcet was invited to dinner by Marie Céleste's careful parents to inspect and to be inspected by his future bride, Thérèse had whispered in her ear, 'Marry him, ma belle, he will never do you any harm.' And Thérèse had been perfectly right.

Pierre was a good man; he had choleric moments, and many weak ones. He was convinced of his own importance without possessing those qualities which convince others; but he had integrity and order.

He wound the clocks regularly every week and was not extravagant.

He had fitted Marie Céleste like a pair of easy shoes.

It was not, perhaps, the rôle he would have chosen, when—full of youth, vigour, and enthusiasm, with his charming manner, his small brown beard, and very light brown eyes—he had sought to make an impression upon her twenty-four years ago.

Marie Céleste had made her own impression upon him without any effort. She had a still, blonde beauty, and an air of imperturbable innocence. She was like a poised white bud, out of reach of the dust; and the impression she had made upon Pierre had been ineffaceable.

Pierre Condorcet had a simple vanity, and it is to be hoped that when Marie Céleste raised her blue, sober eyes, and looked at him on that memorable evening, he had not guessed precisely what was passing through her mind.

Marie Céleste knew nothing of life, but she was a shrewd judge, even then, of human nature. Before she gave her submissive, modest consent to her parents' demands, she had decided for herself that, since she intended to marry, Pierre Condorcet provided the easiest method. It was as the easiest

THE RESIDUE

method of meeting a disagreeable necessity that she continued to prize him throughout their married life.

She made a minute study of his wishes, and carried them out when she thought them sufficiently reasonable.

The three weeks that followed her betrothal had been immersed in a dangerous and thrilling romance, a romance that entirely ignored the existence of Marie Céleste's future husband. Thérèse had flung Marie Céleste into a secret and incredible love affair of her own.

Thérèse had fallen in love utterly against all law and order, not with a young man provided by her parents, but with a young man who had spoken to her over a garden wall. She had thrown him a rosebud out of sheer lightness of heart, and because it had happened to come handy; and then more roses had followed, and notes with the roses, and at last ladders propped against the wall—breathless meetings under ilex trees, with Marie Céleste as watch and ward, sewing with precise and intricate stitches, even while she listened, breathless, for dangers, the last touches on her soberly accumulated trousseau.

The young man was a complete stranger. He had appeared from nowhere, very handsome, and dark, with a tongue as expressive as Thérèse's own, and with perhaps rather more knowledge of the world behind it.

His mother, he explained, was Spanish, and he was employed in a mysterious business which wasn't exactly a profession, but which always enabled him to look extremely smart.

In the end everything was discovered. Thérèse's father and mother were in a whirlwind of anger and dismay. Scenes took place daily which disorganized the whole household. Thérèse was in despair. She was a spoilt and only child, and her despair was a formidable weapon. She wept herself white, and starved herself thin. Her parents resisting and ordering, storming and relenting, abruptly yielded. On the day that Marie Céleste gave her hand and her unwavering observation to Pierre Condorcet, Thérèse tossed her young wild heart (and was permitted to let her hand go with it) to Paul Gustave Arnot. They were married before the same altar, and in very nearly the same white frocks and veils in which they had received their first communion. They

still felt very mysterious and important, and nothing very much came of it afterward.

Without turning her head, Madame Condorcet could see the small gold dome under which they had knelt. Four times a day she heard the jaded tumble of the loose cracked bells which had struck the hour of their divided destinies.

Thérèse, with eyes and cheeks on fire, had gone into a dazzling mist of happiness, out of which her letters streamed like the coloured lights of innumerable fireworks; and Marie Céleste had passed with no mist whatever into the home which stood behind her, shadowy, clean, and without surprises.

Thérèse and her husband never had a home; they passed on their brilliant flight from one coloured centre of life and joy to another. They seemed to be subject to great inequalities of state. Sometimes Thérèse wrote on thick paper with gold monograms and addresses, and sometimes on chance sheets of very inferior quality with no addresses at all.

Her life changed with the paper, but it was always romantic. And then quite suddenly a letter came (it was after the birth of Claire and before that of Charles), a very short, dry little note from Thérèse, to say that Paul had vanished and left not a wrack behind. Thérèse's *dot* had gone also, and she wasn't going to ask her parents for any more money.

That was twenty years ago.

Thérèse was at Nice, only four-and-twenty, penniless and alone.

Marie Céleste was not very rich. She had had a sufficient *dot*, and Pierre earned a *modeste aisance* in a Government office.

She calculated swiftly what she could afford at a pinch, and then accepted the pinch.

It took Thérèse to Paris, and that, and a magnificent diamond ring which Paul had fortunately overlooked in his flight, saw her through the worst of the business.

She had always an admirable head. Disaster merely served to produce her latent abilities. With a voice like velvet, an excellent elocution, and a habit of making the best of things, she very soon became a well-known teacher of singing, and made quite sufficient for herself, and even enough to return, to the last centime, Marie Céleste's generosity.

THE RESIDUE

Marie Céleste could probably have lived by bread alone, but Thérèse Arnot couldn't. There appeared in her letters the name of a certain Robert Pigaud, a man of genius and a sculptor.

Marie Céleste regretted the genius, but she accepted the man.

Thérèse had no children. Marie Céleste believed that children are the vocation of women; without them one falls back upon man. That there was something a little irregular in the relation, Marie Céleste also accepted. She was not religious, and though she was rigidly moral and despised lightness as she despised dirt, her commonsense showed her that you cannot divorce a person whose whereabouts is completely unknown to you.

Marseille is a long way from Paris and very oblivious of what happens there.

Marie Céleste undertook to kill and bury Paul Gustave Arnot as far as Marseille was concerned, and she did it with so much thoroughness that he soon figured, for her also, as safely in the hands of a sufficiently revengeful Deity.

The European War crashed through Marie Céleste's life like a brick through a skylight.

Charles Condorcet in his twentieth year left his bones and his mother's heart at Verdun.

Madame Condorcet was a Frenchwoman as well as a mother. She took this blow tight-lipped and tearless; she did not join Pierre in his pathetic ravings against the German Empire.

But of the two, it would have been safer for a German to appeal to Monsieur Condorcet for mercy than to Madame. He would have got no mercy from Pierre, but he would have been safer.

Madame Condorcet stripped life bare during those chaotic days, and when they were over, she read of punishments with an avidity she kept for no other pursuit.

That is how she saw in the *Temps*, with a rush of blood to her cool head, the familiar name, tracked through countless aliases, of Paul Gustave Arnot, and discovered that he had tried to sell France to her enemies.

She knew in a flash what this meant for Thérèse. It meant ruin and disgrace.

Monsieur Pigaud could marry her now; he no doubt would;

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

for, although a genius, he was a man of certain decency; but if he married her now, it would have to be known that for fifteen years they had dispensed with the ceremony. And worse might happen; Thérèse might be called as a witness.

There was a chance—a small, unbelievable chance—that Thérèse might be so far away in a life so thickly populated as to escape detection, but this chance faded through the sultry summer weeks. Everyone Paul Gustave Arnot had ever known was called as a witness. Justice needed all the aid it could lay its hands on to match Paul Gustave's terrific, slippery wit.

His first wife (it appeared that though there had been innumerable successors, Thérèse had really been the first) must be called upon like the rest.

The judge dealt very leniently with Thérèse Arnot. He knew her history and passed lightly over its details. But the main facts had to be elicited. Thérèse was Paul Gustave's first wife. She had known nothing of him for twenty years, and there was Monsieur Pigaud.

Thérèse wrote to Marie Céleste with the same curious in-expansiveness with which she had written once before of Paul Gustave's flight. As a rule her letters were profuse and demonstrative outpourings which warmed the cockles of Marie Céleste's more inexpressive heart. But in this letter Thérèse merely stated her plans. 'My life in Paris is now impossible,' she wrote. 'I shall, therefore, return to Marseille and hope that among the people who knew me as a child, and those who do not know me at all, I may be allowed to earn my bread. Robert will find the scenery wonderfully stimulating.'

So Monsieur Pigaud was coming too! Thérèse mentioned the train by which she would arrive, and begged that no-one should meet her at the station. Robert was to follow later with the luggage.

Thérèse did not mention Paul Gustave or any single incident of the trial. There had only been one moment of emotion during her brief examination, when the counsel had said, 'Surely, Madame, you must have known this man was living by irregular means, even if he was not already a definite criminal?' And Thérèse answered, 'He was my husband, and I loved him.'

THE RESIDUE

They had not asked her any more questions.

It was curious to Marie Céleste that Thérèse should have admitted, under the eyes of that consummate, conceited villain (the care he gave to his physical appearance in court shocked Marie Céleste nearly as much as his crimes), the compliment of past affection. Could she not simply have said, 'I was young and without experience. He was my husband'? But Thérèse had said, '*Je l'aimais.*' She had never had the solid pride of Marie Céleste. There was something fluid in her; she did not, like Marie Céleste, hold the chosen attitude of her soul beyond the reach of accidents.

A sound reached Marie Céleste like the click of the gate, which she had told Pierre to leave unlocked. She moved slowly between the black ilex that guarded the steep path down to the lower terrace which overlooked the street and the sea. Château d'If and its little flock of islands shone in the deep night like flowers. The sea beneath them was a more massive darkness.

In between the islands flickered the red and green lamps of the fishing-boats. Beyond the rocks, high and brilliant, like a galaxy of stars, a big liner flung its tremendous moving pattern against the screen of night.

The lower terrace was lit up by the street lamps just below.

Madame Condorcet peered down the steps and saw a figure mounting them. A little, old, stout figure, rather out of breath and clumsy, came into the lamplight waveringly, and held out both her hands.

It was (Madame Condorcet thought for a moment) Thérèse's mother—rather a tiresome old woman whom she had always been kind to, but who did not understand Thérèse, and then she remembered that it couldn't be Madame Le Brie, because Thérèse's mother had been dead two years.

It was Thérèse herself, changed beyond recognition, her small face colourless and sallow, her delicate features thickened and blurred, her gay eyes dulled, the mouth that lifted up like wings turned resolutely down.

Marie Céleste did not wait any more. She took Thérèse in her arms and held her. She held her close for a very long time. She held her as close as if she had been Romance.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

It was Thérèse who spoke first.

'It is as I hoped,' she murmured; 'you here alone! And nothing has altered: the gate, the steps, the trees, and here is the terrace where your babies played.'

'My dear, I have not seen you since you lost Charles——' Her voice broke, but Marie Céleste's voice did not break.

'It is true,' she said, 'all these long years lie between us and the summer we spent so happily together at Cassis. Nothing is changed here; even Charles's room is as he left it. I do not let Claire's children play with his toys. Pierre will be back shortly.'

'We dine at eight o'clock on the terrace as usual. Will you take something immediately or will you wait until Pierre returns?'

'Let us sit here,' said Thérèse, 'and wait for Pierre.'

Her eyes rested upon the face of Marie Céleste as they used to rest when she had been naughty and dreaded punishment. It had always reassured her to meet Marie Céleste's unwavering eyes, even when they had been powerless to avert her doom.

The altering of Marie Céleste's eyes was a punishment she had never had to meet. She did not have to meet it now.

Marie Céleste's eyes were blue without being bright; they were the delicate grey-blue of small hedge flowers, and they could look very tender.

'You still appear so young,' Thérèse said humbly, 'and I—I am old, fat, and yellow. One sometimes wonders what has become of all one's little charms.'

'Robert must wonder, for he thought so much of them. Poor Robert! That is the worst of being an artist—they depend on charms.'

'I meant to tell you, *ma chérie*, but there have been too many things; we have put our little irregularities straight. The State has married us.'

'Ah, yes,' said Marie Céleste quietly, 'I had supposed you would do that. It is a better arrangement. He is the same, then, I hope, the good Monsieur Robert?'

Thérèse gave a low, derisive laugh. 'The same?' she asked. 'As what? *Mon enfant*, he is the same as he has been for ten years—twelve—I forget! I keep his house, I fill his tobacco jar.'

THE RESIDUE

We are not too well off, as you know. I cook his meals, and some of what he earns perhaps assists my little marketings. The rest? Does one ask where birds' wings take birds? I ask nothing. He has done, under the circumstances, his duty. He knew I was a respectable woman, and he has treated me as such. And now this has come!

'His career as well as mine, you know, is out—like a spent match.

'Perhaps he may do something down here. He has, at any rate, attempted the sacrifice, and I have accepted his attempt. Could I have done otherwise? One must not lose too many husbands.'

Marie Céleste put her firm, cool hand over Thérèse's feverish one.

'You have done', she said decisively, 'what you should. The past is terrible—unspeakable—but over! Here in this garden and in your little apartment over the way we will renew our youth.

'You have been tossed like a small boat in a storm all these years without solid earth under you, and I, who have had the solid earth, have had my heart torn up by the roots. Well, what is left of us can sit under these trees and talk.'

'Before we talk,' said Thérèse, in a low, toneless voice, 'I must tell you something, Marie. You may despise me, others would despise me. You may not wish to give your confidence to one who is so weak.

'I am French—*j'y suis, j'y reste*. But I am also something else, something you have never been.

'Ah, Marie, I am a lover!

'That man—you spit, perhaps, if you say his name? He was my beloved—he rested against my heart.

'When they took him and bound him at Vincennes, where he stood bravely—for he was always, at a crisis, brave—against that white wall—it was I who was bound with him, and when those shots rang out, I also fell.'

There was a long silence. Then Marie Céleste said, with unshaken tenderness: 'I can understand love. I, too, am a Frenchwoman, but first I am a mother. A mother can always understand love.

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

'Did you see him, my dear? You had the right, I suppose before the execution?'

Thérèse shook her head. 'No,' she said, 'it was enough. I saw him in court. He looked across at me. He was as young as when we parted, and I saw in his face such consternation! It was not remorse, you understand, for what he had done to me—he was horrified to think that he could have married a woman who at this time of day could look so like a frog.

'He had had, you see, twenty years' excitement, pleasure, luxury—and I had had very hard work, and Monsieur Pigaud, of course.

'Well, for Robert's sake also, I could not have gone to see him.

'Robert resented everything, and understood nothing. What man would have done otherwise? No! I said only what I could. They asked if he had ill-treated me, and I said, "Never". If I had not known he was bad? And I said, "He was my husband, and I loved him".'

'Marie, I am still his wife, and I still love him! What ceases ever but what has not existed? You and I sitting here under these trees where we sat as girls, as children almost—are we not the same?'

'Do you not know that, although my hair is grey and thin, my youth blotted out, my wildness run very tame, you are my rock still—and I the only waves that have ever touched it?'

'Ah! That is Pierre entering, is it not?'

Marie Céleste rose, and led the way up the garden.

'It is time', she said briefly, 'that I break the eggs for the omelette. You will, of course, remain.'

A LAST GIFT

James Alexander hated to be called Jim. He was a nervous, eager, excitable fellow who felt he could have done anything if only his father's name had not been written over a shop.

James was better educated than the curate, more dogmatic than the schoolmaster, and as well dressed as the squire's son. D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce simmered in the back of his mind, reassuring him as to the awful things he might one day do if he only got his courage up.

Still, in spite of the relief these great authors gave him, James did not think he would care to be a writer himself. He sometimes thought that writers rather gave themselves away.

The only really self-contained thing in the village was a Glee Club, and this made him feel that perhaps music was the highest art.

One of the ladies in the Glee Club, neither beautiful nor young, but very stout and reliable for accompaniments, agreed to teach him music. James's feeling for this lady was purely that of a foot for the rung of a ladder. Fortunately the lady wanted to be no more than the rung of a ladder to James; she had never been more than that to any man, and seldom as much. So they were both quite satisfied, and from this firm and steady base James shot up into the ecstatic dreams of Chopin, through the emotional romps of Wagner, and on into the mystical region of the Russians.

Here he could forget shops. Ironmongery, which clattered distressfully through his adolescent dreams, became those distant bells of Debussy's engulfed cathedral.

Unfortunately James found that he could not create music, nor would he ever be—the stout lady told him frankly—a great executant; for he had begun too late, nor did he really

want to express what musicians had already expressed for him.

He grew restless under the flood of their inspiration, and his own self-consciousness continued to hamper him. He could not get away from it. He was always in the centre of the picture, failing to do what he wanted and getting his feelings hurt.

Still he practised very steadily on the piano, and continued to sing at the Glee Club with ladies who never opened their mouths wide enough and always held on to their notes too long.

As James was an only child, his father and mother thought him perfectly wonderful, and, though practical people, were prepared to lose a little by his talents.

'You can't see 'im in a shop!' his mother exclaimed proudly, 'can you, Dad? What I say is, it takes all sorts to make a world. Linoleum's no treat to him, and he don't really get the difference between a kettle and a frying-pan!'

His parents were not altogether wrong in their estimation of his powers. James did not cultivate his dislikes to the exclusion of all possible duties. He was a good sound boy, and never shirked drudgery. He had no wish to be a burden on the community just because he was young and good-looking.

On the contrary, he was shy of his good looks, and hardly thought that Beauty should be considered in the light of a profession.

James's tragedy was that the prizes which he would have liked to win were all at the end of avenues which he was not allowed to enter.

It is all very well to say that in England an ironmonger's son can become a Peer of the Realm. But there are a very great many ironmongers and comparatively few peers have sprung from them. Besides, James was not sure that he wanted to be a peer.

He would have liked to be a great hereditary landlord, or an international cricketer. Speed records interested him; nor was he without a fancy for Arctic explorers. After these heroes of the Universe, a mere lord seemed to James very small beer.

A LAST GIFT

Chopin, now——! But Chopin was dead—and so was George Sand. Had she been alive, she was the kind of woman whom James would have fled from, shrieking; but he liked to think of being loved passionately for seven years by a great genius who could break his heart, before he had time to grow definitely tired of her.

The girls James could safely have fallen in love with were very often nicely dressed and occasionally intelligent, but they would not have got tired of James nearly as quickly as James would have got tired of them.

James longed to create something—plastic with lovely curves—and awfully alive! He built, or tried to build, something of this wandering emotion into his music, but music is the end, not the beginning of expression. Formless and void, it streamed away from him, as abstract and intangible as the air he breathed.

Mr. Alexander, whose shop was the centre of his vision, nevertheless had a side-line of intellect which made him almost understand James. 'A good film', he often said to his wife, 'is like meat and drink to me—that's where the lad gets it from!'

Sometimes Mr. Alexander wondered whether his son would not like to be a film star, but James was horrified by the bare suggestion.

'I'd never want to be that, Dad! I don't like being looked at!' he explained fervently. 'Why, going into church gives me the creeps, as it is—I never know what to do with my hands—quite apart from the fact that I'm an agnostic!'

'Well, don't go calling yourself names out loud,' his father urged; 'it would only upset your mother to hear you—and besides, there's the trade to think of! It's always been handy-like to me, singing in the choir, and the Vicar's telling people never to send to London for anything I could supply. Mind you, I don't do it for that, of course; a tenor voice always came natural to me, and hymns I *reelly* like! But if we was to give up going to church, that's where those big shops would tell. See what I mean?'

James saw what his father meant, but this insight did nothing to help him get over the difficulty of what to do with his hands;

nor the greater difficulty of finding the kind of job which would free his tethered soul.

Meanwhile he went on with his music, quite steadily, intending, if everything else failed, to become an organist or a music teacher; and when someone started a class of sculpture in the village, James joined that, too, not caring very much at first for messing about with wet clay, but glad to copy the voice of the lady teacher, who pronounced vowels as if they were a little indecent, and one had better get back to consonants as quickly as possible.

Village life is not what it used to be, but only the grimmest antiquarian refuses to admit that it is a good deal better. 'Buses take you to London or to the nearest town, and people with famous names buy cottages which they think are Elizabethan, settle down in them for life, and very much improve the circulation of trade.

Easter-Seas could only boast of a few mediocre writers, till one day there dropped into its midst the greatest actress in the world, and perhaps its greatest charmer. This famous person had now grown old, but age had left her smile upon her lips and not disturbed her deep, infectious gaiety of soul. She had been a Queen of Comedy, and though there were stories which hinted that her private life had been built upon other lines, she had kept her comedy spirit pure and undefiled.

She bought an old mill at Easter-Seas and turned it upside down, until, what with hot-water supplies, swimming-pools, garages, heating and electric light, the very moss upon the roof threatened to crumble away altogether, if it had not been for the five underground rivers of Sussex, which can be counted on to resist all possible modern methods for drying them up.

James's father was more excited by her presence than anyone else in the village, for he had often seen her on the stage in his youth, and thought the world of her acting. He was the proudest man in England when she came into the shop and asked for something he had never stocked.

When Mr. Alexander told her in despair that he could not give her what she wanted, she gave him what he wanted instead. Her eyes laughed with their old rapturous significance, as if she

A LAST GIFT

said: 'You are the secret of the Universe to me—and *what* a joke the secret of the Universe is!'

So much had happened to her—she had picked up and dropped so many things, loved and been loved by so many people—that neither old age nor death seemed very important to her. They just came along like everything else, and she met them as she had met everything else, with that welcoming, indomitable smile; and, like everything else, old age and death gave way before it—and awaited her convenience.

In the summer she sat in the garden all day long, while people came and went. She welcomed each of them as if they were one of her many husbands on their bridal tours, although she never remembered any of their names.

If it were winter, she sat by the fire instead, and people still streamed to and fro, and picked up the things which fell off her lap onto the floor and shared her delicious laughter.

The villagers loved her so much that they hardly liked to send in their bills, though she always paid them sooner or later, and would have paid them several times over if anyone had had the heart to send them in more than once.

But though everybody in Easter-Seas made some excuse to see or speak to her, James's refusal was adamant. He would not meet her; he would not even look at her in the distance; besides, in the distance she was nothing but an old woman with a bent back.

His father said: 'No matter what you say to her, or she says to you, it always turns to laughter!'

James had a very strong dislike of laughter. He felt that it took a liberty with his retreating soul.

One day, when he was safe at home, idly messing about with his clay. Mary Balin, the charwoman, came in to wash the floor. She had strong, gloomy features, rather like a sick eagle's, and the clay under James's hands ran suddenly clear into form, and became a work of art.

His mother was shocked that he should have modelled anyone so far beneath him as the village char; but his father saw at once that the bust was a good piece of work.

'I knew he'd do something one of these days!' Mr. Alexander

said proudly. 'I wasn't more than turned twenty myself when I thought of my watering-can improvement, and there it is now—and me still getting something from the patent!'

And the next time the great actress passed by his door, Mr. Alexander rushed out and excitedly showed her the bust of Mary Balin.

The old actress looked at it with her laughing eyes for a long time, then she handed it back to Mr. Alexander, and he saw that her eyes had grown wistful, as if she saw beneath the mask of age the face of an old lover.

'That boy of yours, if he exists,' she said—'and you must remember I have only your word for it, for I never see him—has done a difficult thing beautifully! Tell him from me that if he can model an old woman as well as that, he is a finer artist than if he could model a young one!'

James listened in silence to his father's repetition of the old actress's words. He knew what she meant. Young women made themselves. They were there before you, with all their easy beauty, as common as blackberries; but when you were old, and Time had knocked you about, and History had touched you with its immortal finger, you could wash out rooms for all you were worth, and get drunk on Saturday nights into the bargain, but you could not be quite common any more.

But of course you must have the kind of face that History likes to touch; age in itself does nothing but betray the soul.

The bust was talked of here and there all over the village, but it had no immediate consequences, beyond Mary Balin asking for a shilling a week more, if she was to be 'took like that'.

Mr. Alexander said: 'Now, my lad, you'll let me call you out to have a word with our Famous Old Lady—next time she passes by!'

But James shook his head more vehemently than ever. To meet her—like that—when she had shown that she belonged to him!—never.

A month later a message came down to the village from the Mill House, to say that the old actress was dead.

She had had a party the night before. It had been a splendid party, all enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, and she

had gone, laughing, off to bed. She had slept so soundly that when she woke up—if she woke up at all—it was to find herself in another world.

Mr. Alexander insisted on pulling down the blinds of his shop.

'I shall close for the day,' he said, 'I can't help it. It may be considered extreme, but I did without my dinner to see her when I was a boy, and I'll do without a day's income *now*—that I'm not going to see her any more! It's a great pity, my boy, that you've neglected your opportunities, for what you've missed along of your hang-dogness can't be made up to you now—whether or no!'

James shook his head impatiently. He couldn't explain to his father that he hadn't missed very much, because looking on the outside of a life that has passed isn't really as interesting as being the inside of it; and James, whenever he thought of the old actress, lived her very life.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang. James watched his father pick up the receiver, and noted with concern the reddening of his cheeks and the vulgar way in which his light brown eyes nearly popped out of his head.

'My boy,' Mr. Alexander said excitedly, 'here's a chance for you! I knew that char's head would bring you luck! The old lady's daughter has heard of it—from *Her*—mark my words—when she was alive—and she wants you to nip straight up to the Mill House and do a likeness of her mother!'

Mr. Alexander did not dare to say more, for he was afraid of his son. When he wanted anything very much, it so often turned out to be a thing which shocked young James's sensibilities; and he wanted this thing with all his heart.

For a long moment Mr. Alexander thought that he must brace himself afresh to meet one of those hard refusals of desire which youth so often thrusts upon the old. Jim never moved. He sat staring blindly out into Mr. Alexander's neat round garden bed, filled so carefully with lobelias and calceolarias surrounding a hard red core of geraniums.

'Criticizing again!' Mr. Alexander thought to himself bitterly. 'That's all one gets for spending one's spare time making the place a bit smart to please him!'

'Well—I can but try, Dad,' the boy said at last, swallowing nervously.

'That's one way of putting it!' replied his father tartly, though his relief was enormous. 'If you could do Mary Balin swabbing up the floor, you can surely do a lady's face that keeps quiet for as long as you like to look at it; and, what's more, a face the world's *paid* to look at—for the Lord knows how many years!'

James made no reply. He hunted about for his tools and put his modelling-clay into a bucket; then he walked up with his father to the Mill House, in the same tense silence.

It was the height of June. Flowers poured out over the red-brick terraces. Blue anchusa, bright and wild, for she hadn't had them tied up properly, stood waist-high. Stately delphiniums processed on both sides of the garden path up to the very door. Tree lupines, pale yellow and leaf-pink, peonies and pansies, flocked together. Roses rioted over her walls; white and purple passion flowers, gorgeous as southern stars, hung above the porch. A column of honeysuckle, opposite an open window, was being burgled by loud bees.

The front door stood wide open. No blinds were drawn. A woman came down the passage wearing a long blue apron; her arms were filled with sunset-coloured columbines.

She said: 'Come in! Do come in!' and James followed her, suddenly unafraid.

It was such a lovely house! He had never been inside so gay and friendly a place. It wasn't modern and austere, it wasn't old-fashioned and crowded. There seemed to be everywhere more light and colour than James had thought a house could hold. Photographs and pictures of friends stood about the rooms, as if the people she loved wanted to stay near her, even when they weren't there; and all the cushions and curtains were as vivid as flowers.

The passages smelt of lavender and roses, and when James tiptoed after the tall woman with the blue apron into the chamber of death, it was like passing into one of Fra Angelico's pictures of Paradise.

James had never seen a Dead Person before. All the way up

A LAST GIFT

from the village he had been secretly trembling with fear. He longed to ask his father what Dead People were like, but he preferred his father to think that he was acquainted with all Time's accidents. It is very difficult for a son to be reassured by his father and at the same time remain superior to him; and James had felt that to be superior was the more important. Bits of remembered ghost stories had huddled together in James's frightened mind, with pictures of sad, dishevelled animals; and now, looking down at the couch covered high with flowers, he saw only her smile.

Age had withdrawn itself from her bright face. She was neither young nor old, but she was, as she had always been, unconquerably gay.

He heard his father murmuring faint suggestions, and then after a while creeping off out of the room. The woman had already gone.

James was alone now with that smiling face. He looked at it for a long time. The intricate strange game which she had played with the hearts of the world—for half a century—was over. What lay there before him was the end of a great woman—and a great art. She had nothing more to give. But had she nothing more?

Suddenly into James's mind and heart a secret message ran like flame. It was so direct and intense that his defensive aching self-consciousness dropped from him. He forgot that such a thing as a shop existed; he forgot his own youth, his probable incompetence, his dreadful fear of looking a fool!

The face between the flowers held no such fear. This was a woman who had fought the battles of the world. Her heart had been broken, her shut eyes had shed many tears, but only that serene, untarnished smile remained.

Jim took out his tools, arranged his clay, and set to work. Time slipped measurelessly past him. The light changed. Once or twice he moved to shift a blind, or to stand back and gaze upon her changeless face.

Someone came into the room at last.

James did not look up, but he heard a woman's voice saying: 'Don't do any more, it's quite perfect!'

STORIES OF EXPERIENCE

Her praise neither pleased nor disconcerted him. He knew now what he was about—what he must be about forever. He had only to do, always without confusion, the task she had set him.

He paused, and looked, from his work, back to the serene and shadowed face.

Surely the smile upon those quiet lips had deepened?

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